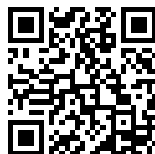

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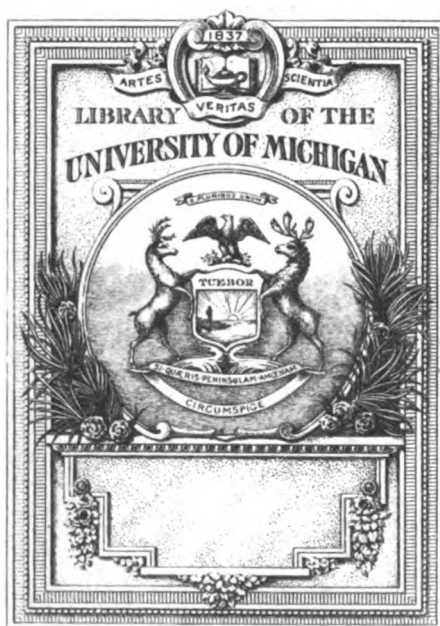
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THE
BEST CONTINENTAL
SHORT STORIES
OF 1923-24

And the
Yearbook of the Continental
Short Story

Edited by
Richard Eaton



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**THE BEST CONTINENTAL
SHORT STORIES OF 1923-1924**

BY RICHARD EATON

MUSTAPHA KEMAL

UNDER THE RED FLAG

PIONNIERS OU DEMENTS

MASHA

**THE BEST FRENCH SHORT STORIES
OF 1923-24**

THE BEST CONTINENTAL SHORT STORIES OF 1923-1924

AND THE YEARBOOK OF THE
CONTINENTAL SHORT STORY

EDITED BY RICHARD EATON



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PREFACE

The increasing popularity of the short story throughout the world may be directly attributed to the influence of modern civilization. The Industrial Revolution of the past century has been supplemented today by an Artistic Revolution whose basis is the application of the time-saving devices of industry to artistic production. Literature more than any other art is the reflection of the æsthetic development of a nation. Hence, with the growing tendency towards efficiency and standardization, the short story has achieved an importance second to no other branch of literature.

Psychologically the public is able to obtain the same reaction from a well constructed short story as from a novel ten times as long. This represents an economy of time and money for the reader. The writer has learned to depict a life story whether tragic or comic in twenty odd pages as vividly as in two hundred and fifty. Moreover the short story, by reason of its brevity, permits the author to revise his work in a way which the exigencies of modern life render difficult in the case of a novel. It has thus become possible to produce a story far more correct artistically than would otherwise be the case, with a minimum of labor. Perhaps this is not the reason for the remarkable growth in popularity of the short story, but certainly in Continental Europe, the importance of the short story in the literary life of each country is in direct proportion to the economic development. In Italy, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, and Latvia, where one finds practically the same standard of life or civilization as you will in the Anglo-Saxon countries, the short story has attained the same prestige as in America, England, and France. On the contrary, in those countries where life is still more or less mediæval, the production of short stories is practically minimum.

The task accordingly of choosing the best short story published in each country since July, 1923, is none too easy.

THE FATE OF THE BARON VON LEISENBOHG

By ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

IT was a warm evening in May when Kläre Heil reappeared for the first time as Queen of the Night. The circumstance which had kept the singer away from the opera for almost two months was a matter of common knowledge. Prince Richard Bedenbruck had been injured in a fall from his horse on the fifteenth of March, and after an illness of a few hours—during which time Kläre had never left his side—had died in her arms. Kläre's anguish had been so intense that at first they feared for her life, later for her mind, and until recently, for her voice. This last fear proved to be quite as unfounded as the other two. As she came before the public she received a friendly and expectant greeting; but after the first great *aria* her more intimate friends could accept the felicitations of her more distant acquaintances. In the fourth gallery the childish red face of little Fräulein Fanny Ringeiser beamed with happiness, and the *habitués* of the upper rows smiled to their comrade sympathetically. They all knew that Fanny, although she was nothing more than the daughter of a *Mariahilf* haberdasher, belonged to the popular prima donna's closer circle, that she had frequently been invited to her house for tea, and had secretly been in love with the dead Prince. Between acts Fanny explained to her friends that Kläre had got the idea from the Baron von Leisenbohg of selecting the Queen of the Night for her first appearance, feeling that the dark costume would correspond most closely to her mood.

As to the Baron, he took his orchestra seat—first row centre, on the aisle as usual—and acknowledged the greetings of his acquaintances with an amiable but almost painful smile. Today various memories were running through his head. He had met Kläre about eight years ago. At that

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time he was providing for the artistic education of a slender young lady with red hair and was attending an evening performance at the Eisenstein Singing School where his protégée as Mignon was making her first public appearance. The same evening he saw and heard Kläre, who sang Philine in the same scene. He was then twenty-five years old, unattached, and godless. He simply forgot about Mignon, obtained an introduction through Frau Natalie Eisenstein to Philine, and declared to her that his heart, his influence, and his position were at her service. At that time Kläre was living with her mother, the widow of a higher postal official; and she was in love with a young medical student with whom she frequently drank tea and chatted in his room in the Alservorstadt. She was deaf to the Baron's stormy courtship, but with her disposition softened by Leisenbohg's attentions she became the mistress of the student. The Baron, to whom she made no secret of this fact, returned to his auburn protégée, but kept up his acquaintanceship with Kläre. On every holiday that furnished the slightest opportunity he sent her flowers and bonbons, and he would pay an occasional formal call at the house of the postal official's widow.

In the fall Kläre took up her first engagement in Detmold. The Baron von Leisenbohg—at that time still an official in the ministry—used his first Christmas holidays to visit Kläre at her new place of residence. He knew that the student had become a doctor and had married in September, and he took hope. But Kläre, upright as ever, informed the Baron immediately after their meeting that in the meanwhile she had entered on tender relations with the tenor of the Hoftheater, with the result that Leisenbohg could take away no other memories of Detmold than a platonic stroll through the city park and a supper in the theatre restaurant in company with several colleagues of both sexes. Nevertheless he repeated his trip to Detmold several times, rejoiced in his æsthetic concern for Kläre's considerable progress, and, further, hoped for the next season, for which the tenor was already contracted in Hamburg. But this year he was again disappointed, since Kläre had felt herself obliged to grant the petitions of a whole-

sale merchant of Dutch descent, by the name of Louis Verhagen.

When, in her third season, Kläre was called to a place in the Dresden Hoftheater, in spite of his youth the Baron threw over a very promising political career and moved to Dresden. Now he spent each evening with Kläre and her mother, who had acquired a perfectly lovely innocence in all matters concerning her daughter . . . and he took new hope. But unfortunately the Dutchman had the unpleasant habit of announcing in every letter that he would arrive the next day, assuring his mistress that she was surrounded by an army of spies, and incidentally threatening her with the most painful forms of death in the event of her being unfaithful to him. But as he never did come, and Kläre began falling gradually into a state of extreme nervousness, Leisenbohg resolved to end the matter at all costs, and left Detmold to carry on his transactions in person. To his astonishment the Dutchman declared that he had sent these threatening love letters to her purely out of gallantry, and that as a matter of fact nothing would be more agreeable to him than to be freed of all further responsibility. Elated, Leisenbohg came back to Dresden and told Kläre of the pleasant outcome of the interview. She thanked him cordially, but the first thrust at further tenderness was parried with an abruptness which took the Baron by surprise. After a few brief and searching questions she finally confessed to him that during his absence no less than Prince Kajetan himself had conceived a violent passion for her and had sworn to do himself some harm if he was not heard. It was only natural that she had ultimately been forced to give in, so as to avoid throwing the reigning house and the country at large into unspeakable misery.

With a reasonably broken heart Leisenbohg left the city and returned to Vienna. Here he began using his influence, and his continuous efforts were responsible to no small degree for the offer which Kläre received to sing in opera in Vienna the next year. After a very successful appearance as guest star she began her engagement in October, and the splendid flowers from the Baron she found in her dressing-room on the evening of her first appearance, seemed to

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express both supplication and hope. But the kind protector who waited for her in agitation following the performance was to learn that once more he had come too late. The blond rehearsal director—who was also of no small importance as a song writer—with whom she had been studying these last weeks had been granted privileges by her which she could not have infringed upon for anything in the world.

Since then seven years had passed. The director was followed by Herr Klemens von Rhodewyl, the dashing gentleman rider; Herr von Rhodewyl by the bandmaster Vincenz Klaudi, who frequently joined so loudly in the operas he conducted that one could not hear the singers; the bandmaster by Count von Alban-Rattony, a man who had gambled away his Hungarian estate at cards and later won back a castle in lower Austria; the Count by Herr Edgar Wilhelm, author of ballet-texts, which he paid handsome prices to have set to music, of tragedies for which he hired the Jantschtheater to produce, and of poems which he had printed in the most beautiful type, in the stupidest, most select paper of the capital; Herr Edgar Wilhelm was followed by a gentleman named Amandus Meier, who was nothing except nineteen years old and very pretty, and who had nothing but a fox terrier that could stand on its head; and after Herr Meier came the most elegant man of the monarchy, Prince Richard Bedenbruck.

Kläre had never treated her affairs as a secret. At all times she kept a simple *bourgeois* house, except that every once in a while there was a change of masters. She was unusually favoured by the public. Higher circles were pleased that she went to Mass every Sunday, confessed twice a month, wore on her bosom as an amulet a picture of the Madonna blessed by the Pope, and never went to bed without saying her prayers. There was seldom a charity bazaar in which she was not one of the saleswomen; and ladies of the aristocracy as well as those of the Jewish financial circles were delighted if they could offer their wares in the same booth with Kläre. She always had a winning smile for those youthful enthusiasts who hovered about the stage door. The flowers which were lavished upon her she distributed among this patient throng; and once when the

flowers had been left behind in her dressing-room she said in the snappy Viennese which suited her so well, "My soul, if I haven't left the salad up there in my room. Come around tomorrow afternoon, kids, if you want to come in on it." Then she got into her cab, stuck her head out of the window, and shouted, "There's a coffee in it, too."

Fanny Ringeiser had belonged to the few who had found the courage to accept this invitation. Kläre dropped into a light conversation with her, asked as affably as an archduchess about her family relations, and was so taken in by the chatter of this fresh and vigorous girl that she pressed her to come back again soon. Fanny accepted her offer, and soon succeeded in winning a respected place in the house of the artist; and she maintained this position by keeping her distance in spite of Kläre's freedom with her. In the course of years Fanny received any number of proposals, mostly from among young sons of manufacturers in the *Mariahilf* section, with whom she usually danced at balls. But she refused them all, since with unswerving regularity she persisted in falling in love with whoever was Kläre's lover at the time.

For over three years Kläre had been true to Prince *Bedenbruck*, but with a deeper passion than she had loved his predecessors; and although *Leisenbohg* had never quite abandoned hope in spite of all his disappointments, he began seriously wondering whether the happiness he had longed for for ten years would ever bloom. Always, when he saw someone beginning to slip out of favour, he would take leave of his other darling in order to be prepared at any moment and for all contingencies. He had done the same after the sudden death of Prince *Richard*; but for the first time it was more through habit than conviction. For Kläre's pain seemed so immoderate that it was everyone's opinion she would shut herself off now for all time from the joys of this life. Every day she rode out to the cemetery and laid flowers on the grave of the departed. She lost all interest in bright-coloured clothing, and locked up her jewelry in the most out-of-the-way corner of her writing-desk. It required earnest pleading to dissuade her from leaving the stage forever.

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After her first reappearance, which had come off so brilliantly, her external life, at least, took its usual course. The former circle of more removed friends reassembled. The musical critic, Bernhard Feuestein, appeared, with either spinach or tomato spots on his vest according to yesterday's bill of fare, and grumbled—much to Kläre's undisguised delight—over colleagues, male and female, and director. As to Lucius and Christian, the two cousins of Prince Richard from the other line of Bedenbrucks, she suffered herself to be courted as formerly in the most uncompromising and respectable style. A gentleman of the French embassy and a young Bohemian virtuoso at the piano were introduced to her, and on the tenth of June she went to the races again for the first time. But as Prince Lucius, who had a turn for poetry, expressed it, only her mind was awake; her heart was still sunk in slumber. Yes, if one of her younger or elder friends ventured the slightest hint that there was anything like tenderness or passion in the world, the last trace of a smile vanished from her face, she stared dully before her, and occasionally she would lift her hand as though to ward off something, a gesture which seemed to apply to all men, and for all time.

Then it happened in the latter half of June that a singer from the north by the name of Sigurd Olse sang *Tristan*. His voice was clear and powerful, if not especially noble; he was of an almost superhumanly large build, and with a certain inclination to fullness; at times when in repose his face would be quite without distinction, but as soon as he began singing his steel-grey eyes would light up with a mysterious inner fire, and with his voice and his glance he seemed to sweep all away with him—especially women.

Kläre sat with her unoccupied colleagues in the company's box. She alone seemed to remain unmoved. The next morning Sigurd Olse was introduced to her in the director's office. She spoke a few friendly, but almost cool words to him about yesterday's performance. The same afternoon he paid her a visit, without waiting to be invited. Baron Leisenbohg and Fanny Ringeiser were present. Sigurd drank tea with them. He told of his parents, who lived in a little Norwegian fishing village; he told of the remarkable discov-

ery of his talent by a travelling Englishman who had landed in a white yacht in a remote fjord; he told of his wife, an Italian, who had died on the Atlantic Ocean during their honeymoon and had been lowered into the sea. After he had left, the others remained for a long time plunged in silence. Fanny was examining with great care her empty tea-cup; Kläre had sat down at the piano and was resting her arms on the closed cover; the Baron was silently and anxiously immersed in the problem of why, during the account of Sigurd's wedding trip, Kläre had neglected that peculiar gesture with which since the death of the Prince she had brushed aside all hints of some further passionate or tender relations on this earth.

As further starring parts Sigurd sang Siegfried and Lohengrin. Each time Kläre sat unmoved in her box. But the singer, who associated with hardly any one but the Norwegian ambassador, appeared every afternoon at Kläre's, seldom failing to meet Fräulein Fanny Ringeiser there, and never failing to meet the Baron.

On the twenty-seventh of June as Tristan he made his last appearance. Kläre sat unmoved in the company's box. The following morning she drove with Fanny to the cemetery and laid an enormous wreath on the Prince's grave. The same evening she gave a party in honour of the singer, who was to leave Vienna the day after.

The circle of friends was completely assembled. Everyone was aware of the passion which Sigurd had conceived for Kläre. As usual, he spoke quite volubly and with agitation. Among other things he told how during his voyage here on the ship, an Arabian woman, married to a Russian grand-duke, had prophesied from the lines of his hands that he was soon to go through the most fatal period of his life. He trusted wholly in this prophecy, and superstition seemed with him to be something deeper than a mere method of making himself interesting. He also spoke of the generally well-known fact that last year, immediately after his landing in New York where he was to fill an engagement as visiting star, on that very day, yes, on that very hour, although he had to pay a severe penalty, he had taken another ship back to Europe; and all this simply

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because on the wharf a black cat had run between his legs. He certainly had every reason to believe in such secret relationships between incomprehensible signs and the fate of man. One evening at Covent Garden in London, before going on the stage he had neglected to murmur a certain little charm handed down by his grandmother . . . and his voice had suddenly failed him. One night in a dream a winged angel had appeared before him in rose-coloured tights, announcing to him the death of his favourite barber . . . and sure enough, the next morning it was discovered that this poor devil had hanged himself. Further, he always carried with him a short but very significant letter which had been given to him in a spiritualist séance in Brussels by the spirit of the dead singer, Cornelia Lujan; it contained in fluent Portuguese the prediction that he was destined to become the greatest singer of the old and the new world. He told all these things today; and as the spirit-letter, written on rose-coloured paper of the house of Glienwood, was passed from hand to hand, an under-current passed through the entire room. But Kläre herself scarcely altered her expression, and merely nodded her head indifferently now and then. Nevertheless, Leisenbohlg's unrest attained a high intensity. To his sharpened eye the signs of approaching danger became clearer. To begin, Sigurd, like all of Kläre's previous lovers, had formed a pronounced attachment to him during supper, had invited him to his place on the fjord at Molde, and finally brought in the "I say, old fellow!" and the "Listen, old boy!" In addition, Fanny Ringeiser would tremble all over whenever Sigurd addressed a word to her, she would become alternately white and red when he looked at her with his large steel-grey eyes, and when he spoke of his imminent departure she began crying softly. But even now Kläre remained calm and serious. She scarcely returned Sigurd's singeing glances, she spoke with no more vivacity to him than to the others; and when he finally kissed her hand and looked upon her with eyes which seemed to beg, to promise, to despair, her own remained clouded and her features unmoved. Leisenbohlg observed all this with distrust and anxiety. But when the evening was over and everyone

was going, the Baron experienced something unexpected. He was last to reach Kläre's hand at parting; but when, like the others, he was about to go on, she held his hand tightly and whispered to him, "Come back again." He wondered if he had not heard right. But she pressed his hand again, and with her lips almost to his ear she repeated, "Come back again; I shall expect you in an hour."

Almost in a swoon, he went along with the others. With Fanny he accompanied Sigurd to the hotel, and as if from a great distance listened to his ravings about Kläre. Then he led Fanny Ringeiser through the quiet streets in the soft coolness of the night to Mariahilf, and from behind a cloud he saw the stupid tears roll down across her red, childish cheeks. Then he took a cab back to Kläre's. He saw a light glimmering through the curtains of her bedroom; he saw her shadow glide by; her head appeared at the edge of the curtain and nodded to him. He had not dreamed that she was waiting for him.

The next morning Baron von Leisenbohg went for a ride in the Prater. He felt happy and young. It seemed to him that some deeper meaning lay in this belated fulfilment of his yearning. His experiences of last night had been the most marvellous surprise, and yet they were hardly more than the heightening and necessary culmination of his previous relationship with Kläre. He felt now that it could not have happened otherwise, and made plans for the immediate and distant future. "How long will she remain on the stage?" he thought. "Perhaps four or five years. Then, but not sooner, I will marry her. We will live together in the country, not far from Vienna, in St. Veit, perhaps, or in Lainz. I shall buy a small house there, or else have one built according to her own ideas. We shall live pretty much in retirement, but frequently take long trips . . . to Spain, Egypt, India . . ." In this manner he went on dreaming to himself, letting his horse out as he crossed the meadows by the Heustadl. Then he trotted back through the Hauptallee, and at the Praterstern took his seat in his carriage. He stopped in at Fossatti's and sent Kläre a bouquet of splendid dark roses. He had breakfast alone as usual in his rooms on the Schwarzenbergplatz,

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and after his meal lay down on the divan. He was filled with a strong yearning for Kläre. What had all the other women meant to him? They had been a distraction, nothing more. And he foresaw the day when Kläre likewise would say to him, "What were they all to me? You are the only man, and the first man, whom I have loved." . . . And lying on the divan, with eyes closed, he let the whole string of them glide by . . . Certainly, she had loved no one before him, and had always loved him, perhaps, in each of the others!

The Baron dressed, and then started on the well known way to her house slowly, as though to enjoy for a few seconds longer the anticipation of their meeting. There were a good many promenaders on the Ring, but the season was noticeably nearing its close. And Leisenbohg was glad that summer was here; he would travel with Kläre, see the ocean or the mountains with her . . . and he had to check himself to keep from shouting aloud in his enthusiasm.

He halted in front of her house and looked up at the windows. The light of the afternoon sun was reflected in them and nearly blinded him. He mounted the two flights to her apartment, and rang. No one came to let him in. He rang again. No one came. Leisenbohg now noticed that a padlock had been put on the door. What could that mean? Was he in the wrong place? She did not have a card on the door, but on the door adjoining he read as usual, "Oberstleutnant von Jeleskowits." Undeniably he was standing in front of her apartment, and it was locked up. He hurried down the stairs, and tore open the door of the janitor's apartment. The janitress was sitting on a bed in the semi-darkness. A child was looking up from the basement to the street; another was blowing a meaningless tune on a comb.

"Is Fräulein Heil not at home?" asked the Baron.

The woman stood up. "No, Herr Baron, Fräulein Heil has left town . . ."

"What!" the Baron shouted. "But of course," he added immediately, "she left at about three o'clock, didn't she?"

"No, Herr Baron, the Fräulein left about eight this morning."

"And where to? . . . Or that is, did she go directly to—" he said haphazardly, "did she go directly to Dresden?"

"No, Herr Baron; she left no address. She said that she would write where she is."

"So, yes, yes, quite so. Naturally . . . many thanks."

He turned away and came up on the street again. He could not help looking back at the house. How differently the evening sun was reflected in the windows now. The heavy melancholy mugginess of a summer evening lay over the city. Kläre was gone! . . . Why? . . . She had fled from him? . . . What was the meaning of that? . . . He thought at first of going to the opera. But he remembered that the season was closing the day after tomorrow, and that for the last couple of days Kläre had nothing to do there.

So he went to 76 Mariahilferstrasse where the Ringeisers lived. An old cook came to the door, and examined this tony visitor with some distrust. He had the cook call Frau Ringeiser. "Is Fräulein Fanny at home?" he asked with an excitement that he could not master.

"How's that?" Frau Ringeiser asked sharply.

The Baron introduced himself.

"Oh, quite so," said Frau Ringeiser. "Would the Herr Baron mind stepping in?"

He stepped into the hall and asked again, "Is Fräulein Fanny not at home?"

"If the Herr Baron would just step a little farther." Leisenbohg had to follow her, and found himself in a low half-dark room with blue-velvet furniture, and windows hung with rep curtains of the same colour. "No," Frau Ringeiser said, "our Fanny is not at home. Fräulein has taken her along on her vacation."

"Where?" the Baron asked, staring at a photograph of Kläre which stood in a narrow gold frame on the piano.

"Where? That I don't know," said Frau Ringeiser. "About eight o'clock this morning Fräulein Heil was here in person and begged me to let Fanny go along with her. Well, she just asked so beautifully—I simply couldn't say no."

"But where . . . where!" Leisenbohg insisted.

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"That I really couldn't say. Fanny is to telegraph me as soon as Fräulein Heil makes up her mind where she is going to stay. Perhaps as early as tomorrow morning, or the morning after."

"So," Leisenbohg said, letting himself sink down on a little cane-bottomed stool in front of the piano. He was silent a few seconds; then he arose suddenly, held out his hand to Frau Ringeiser, begged her forgiveness for the trouble he had caused her, and slowly descended the dark stairway of the old house.

He shook his head. She had been very cautious, to be sure . . . much more cautious than necessary. For she might have known that he would not have been importunate.

"Where shall we go, Herr Baron?" the driver asked, and Leisenbohg noticed that he had been sitting in the open carriage for quite a while simply staring in front of him. Following a sudden impulse he answered. "To the Hotel Bristol."

Sigurd Olse had not yet left. He sent word that the Baron should be asked to come up to his room, received him warmly, and suggested that they spend the last evening of his stay in Vienna together. Leisenbohg had already been deeply affected by the fact that Sigurd Olse was still in Vienna; and this added amiability touched him to tears. Sigurd immediately began speaking of Kläre. He begged Leisenbohg to tell him as much of her as he could, for he knew perfectly that her oldest and dearest friend stood before him in the person of the Baron. So Leisenbohg sat down on a trunk and talked of Kläre. It was soothing to him that he could discuss her . . . He told the singer nearly everything, with the exception of certain facts which he felt bound as a gentleman to leave unspoken. Sigurd listened, and seemed to be charmed.

At supper, the singer invited his friend to leave Vienna with him this very evening and accompany him to his estate at Molde. The Baron was strangely moved. He did not accept for the present, but promised to visit him in the course of the summer.

They went to the station together. "Perhaps you will consider me a fool," Sigurd said, "but I would like to pass

her windows just once more." Leisenbohlg looked at him furtively. Perhaps this was a ruse . . . or was it the final proof that the singer was beyond suspicion? When they reached Kläre's, Sigurd threw a kiss toward the locked windows. Then he said, "Remember me to her."

Leisenbohlg nodded; "I shall tell her when she returns." Sigurd looked at him in surprise.

"She is gone already," Leisenbohlg appended. "She left early this morning—without saying goodbye—but that is the usual thing with her," he added the lie.

"Gone," Sigurd repeated, and fell to thinking. They were both silent.

Before the train pulled out they embraced each other like old friends.

That night the Baron cried in bed, something which had not occurred to him since childhood. The one hour of pleasure that he had spent with Kläre seemed beaten upon by dismal storms. He felt that her eyes last night had gleamed like mad. Now he had it all straight. He had heeded her call too promptly. The shadow of Prince Bedenbruck still held her under its influence, and Leisenbohlg felt that he had finally possessed Kläre only to lose her forever.

For a few days he went around Vienna at a loss what to do with his days and nights. Newspapers, whist, riding . . . all these previous ways of spending his time now meant absolutely nothing to him. He felt that his whole existence depended on Kläre for its meaning, and that even his affairs with other women had been simply the reflection of his passion for Kläre. The city seemed covered by a continual grey mist. When he spoke to people their voices were subdued; and they stared at him strangely, even traitorously. One evening he drove to the station and half mechanically bought a ticket to Ischl. He ran into acquaintances there who inquired innocently after Kläre; his answers were irritated and impolite, with the result that he was obliged to fight a duel with a gentleman who did not concern him in the least. He stood up lethargically, heard the bullet whistle by his ear, shot into the air, and left Ischl half an hour after the duel. He went to

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the Tyrol, the Engadine, the Bernese Oberland, the Lake of Geneva; rowed, took walks, climbed mountains, slept once in an Alpine herdsman's hut, and, in short, managed to live each day knowing as little of the day past as of the day following.

One morning he received a forwarded telegram. He opened it with trembling fingers, and read, "If you are my friend keep your promise and come to me immediately. For I am in need of a friend. Sigurd Olse." Leisenbohg did not doubt for a moment but that the contents of this telegram had something to do with Kläre. He packed as hurriedly as possible and left Aix, where he happened to be at the time, at the earliest opportunity. He went straight through Munich to Hamburg and took the boat which would bring him to Molde *via* Stavanger; he arrived one clear summer evening. It had seemed as though the journey would never end. He remained totally impervious to the scenery.

Also, he had been unable lately to recall Kläre's singing, or even her features. But when he saw Sigurd standing on the shore, dressed in white flannels and with a white cap, it seemed as though he had seen him only last evening. And in spite of his agitation he smiled from the deck in answer to Sigurd's greeting, and remained quite composed as he walked down the gangway.

"I thank you a thousand times for answering my call," Sigurd said. And then he added simply, "It is all over with me."

The Baron observed him critically. Sigurd looked very pale and the hair about his temples had become noticeably grey. He was carrying on his arm a dull green plaid.

"What is the matter? What has happened?" Leisenbohg asked, smiling stiffly.

"You shall learn everything," Sigurd said. It struck the Baron that Sigurd's voice was not so full as it used to be. They went along the beautiful sea-drive in a small, narrow carriage. Both were silent. Leisenbohg did not dare to ask. He kept staring out at the water. It was nearly still; he got the peculiar notion of counting the waves, but found that this was impossible. Then he looked up at the sky,

and it seemed as though the stars were slowly falling. Finally it occurred to him that a singer was in this world somewhere; Kläre Heil by name—but that was not greatly important. There was a jolt, and the carriage stopped before a plain white house surrounded by green. They took dinner on a verandah facing the sea. They were waited on by a stolid-faced servant whose expression became positively ominous when he was pouring the wine. About them lay the brilliant northern light.

"Well?" Leisenbohg asked, as a sudden wave of impatience came over him.

"I am a lost man," Sigurd said, staring in front of him.

"How do you mean?" Leisenbohg asked tonelessly. "And how can I help you?" he added mechanically.

"Not much. I have no idea." And he gazed over the tablecloth, over the banisters, the garden, the trellis, the street, the sea . . . into nothing.

Leisenbohg became inwardly paralyzed. . . . All sorts of thoughts shot through him. . . . What could have happened? . . . Was Kläre dead? . . . Had Sigurd murdered her? . . . Yet no, that was impossible. . . . There he was, sitting in front of him. . . . But why did he not go on? . . . And suddenly, oppressed with an egregious anxiety, Leisenbohg groaned, "Where is Kläre?"

The singer turned towards him slowly. His somewhat heavy face lit up; he seemed to be smiling—unless it was the effect of the moonlight. In any case Leisenbohg found at this moment that the man who was sitting opposite him, leaning back with both hands in his pockets, his legs stretched out beneath the table, and this veiled expression on his face, resembled nothing in the world more closely than a Pierrot. The green plaid was hanging on the banister, and seemed to the Baron at this moment like a dear old friend. But what did this ridiculous plaid have to do with him? Perhaps he was dreaming? . . . He was in Molde. Strangely enough. . . . If he had been wise he would simply have telegraphed the singer from Aix, "What is wrong? What do you want of me, Pierrot?" And he suddenly repeated his previous question, although more politely and with more patience, "Where is Kläre?"

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The singer nodded several times. "To be sure, the whole thing involves her. Are you my friend?"

Leisenbohg nodded. He felt a slight chill. A warm wind was blowing in from the sea. "I am your friend. What do you want of me?"

"Do you remember the evening we last saw each other, Baron? We had supper together at the Bristol and you went with me to the station."

Leisenbohg nodded again.

"Of course you could not have suspected that Kläre Heil was leaving Vienna in the same train with me."

Leisenbohg let his head sink heavily on his breast. . . .

"I did not suspect it any more than you," Sigurd continued. "I did not see Kläre until the next morning when we had stopped for breakfast. She was sitting over her coffee in the dining-room with Fanny Ringeiser. From the way she acted I thought that we had met purely by chance. It was not by chance."

"Go on," the Baron said, observing the green plaid as it swayed gently.

"She confessed to me later that it was not by chance. From this morning on we remained together, Kläre, Fanny, and I. We put up at one of your charming little Austrian lakes. We took a lonely house between water and forest, secluded from the rest of humanity. We were very happy."

He spoke so slowly that Leisenbohg nearly went mad.

"What did he bring me here for?" he thought. "What does he want of me? Did she confess to him? What does that have to do with him? Why is he staring into my face so steadily? Why am I sitting here in Molde on a verandah with a Pierrot? Isn't it merely a dream, after all? Perhaps I am sleeping in Kläre's arms? Perhaps this is the same night?"—And involuntarily he strained his eyes wide open.

"Will you avenge me?" Sigurd asked suddenly.

"Avenge? . . . What for? What has happened?" the Baron asked; and he heard his own words as though they came from a distance.

"Because she has ruined me. Because I am lost."

"Explain to me, finally," Leisenbohg said in a hard voice.

"Fanny Ringeiser was with us," Sigurd continued. "She is a nice girl, don't you think?"

"Yes, she is a nice girl," Leisenbohlg answered, and suddenly saw in front of him the half-dark room with the blue velvet furniture and the rep curtains, where he had talked with Fanny's mother hundreds of years ago.

"And she is quite a stupid girl, don't you think?"

"I think so," the Baron replied.

"I know so," Sigurd said. "She did not suspect how happy we were." And he was silent for a long while.

"Go on," Leisenbohlg said, and waited.

"One morning Kläre was still asleep," Sigurd began again. "She always used to sleep quite late into the morning. But I was taking a walk in the forest. Suddenly Fanny came running up behind me. 'You must get away, Herr Olse, before it is too late. Hurry away from here; you are in great danger!' Strangely enough, at first she would say nothing more to me. But I insisted, and soon learned what sort of danger, according to her, was threatening me. Ah! She thought that I could still be saved, or else she certainly would have said nothing to me about it!"

The green plaid on the banisters was inflated like a sail; the lamp on the table flickered a little.

"What did Fanny tell you?" Leisenbohlg asked.

"Do you remember the evening," Sigurd asked, "when we were all guests at Kläre's house? That same morning Kläre had gone to the cemetery with Fanny; and by the Prince's grave she confessed the hideous thing to her friend."

"The hideous thing?" the Baron was trembling.

"Yes—you know how the Prince died? He fell from his horse and lived for about an hour afterwards."

"I know."

"No one was with him except Kläre."

"I know."

"He would not see anyone but her. And while he was dying he made a curse."

"A curse?"

"A curse—'Kläre,' the Prince said, 'do not forget me. I would have no rest in the grave if you forgot me.'—'I will

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never forget you,' Kläre answered.—'Swear to me that you will never forget me.'—'I swear.'—'Kläre, I love you, and I must die!'

"I am speaking," Sigurd said, "and I am speaking for Fanny, and Fanny is speaking for Kläre, and Kläre is speaking for the Prince. Don't you understand me?"

Leisenbohg listened with taut nerves. It seemed to him as though he could hear the voice of the dead Prince coming up out of the thrice-sealed coffin and ringing through the night.

"'Kläre, I love you, and I must die! You are so young, and I must die. . . . And someone else will come after me. . . . I know it; that's what will happen.—Someone else will hold you in his arms and be happy with you. . . . He shall not—he dare not—he dare not! . . . I curse him. Do you hear, Kläre? I curse him! . . . The first man who kisses these lips, who embraces this body after me—may his soul rot in Hell! . . . Kläre, Heaven hears the curse of a dying man. . . . Take care for yourself—take care for him. . . . He is destined for Hell! In madness, misery, and death! Woe! Woe! Woe!'"

Sigurd, out of whose mouth the voice of the dead Prince had resounded, had arisen. He was standing there, large and stout in his white flannels, looking off into the clean night. The green plaid sank from the banisters into the garden. The Baron felt himself freezing horribly. It was as though his body was becoming rigid. He wanted to cry out, but when he opened his mouth no sound came. At this moment he was in the little room of Mme. Eisenstein, the music teacher—where he had seen Kläre for the first time. A Pierrot was standing on the stage declaiming, "With this curse on his lips Prince Bedenbruck died, and . . . listen . . . the wretch in whose arms she lay, the victim on whom the curse will be fulfilled, is I! . . . I! . . . I! . . ."

Then the stage collapsed with a loud crash, and sank before Leisenbohg's eyes into the sea. But he, without a word, fell over backwards in his chair—like a marionette.

Sigurd sprang up, calling for help. Two servants came, picked up the unconscious man and laid him in an armchair

which was standing off to one side of the table. One of them ran for a doctor; the other brought water and vinegar. Sigurd rubbed the Baron's forehead and temples, but he remained motionless. Then the doctor arrived and began his examination. It did not last long. At the end he said, "This gentleman is dead!"

Sigurd Olse was very agitated. He asked the doctor to make all necessary arrangements, and left the terrace. He passed through the drawing-room, went upstairs to his own bedroom, made a light, and wrote hastily:

"Kläre! I found your telegram at Molde, where I had fled immediately. I will confess that I did not believe you; I thought that you were trying to quiet me with a lie. Forgive me—I am no longer in doubt. The Baron von Leisenbohg was here. I sent for him. I asked him no questions; for as a man of honour he would have had to lie to me. I had an ingenious idea. I told him of the dead Prince's curse. The effect was amazing: the Baron fell back in his chair and died on the spot."

Sigurd stopped writing. He became very serious and seemed to be thinking. Then he placed himself in the middle of the room and raised his voice in song. At first it was a bit timid and veiled; but it gradually grew in volume, finally becoming as powerful as though it were echoing back from the waves.—A contented smile passed over Sigurd's features. He drew a deep breath. He went to the writing-table again and added to his message:

"Dearest Kläre! Forgive me—everything is lovely again. I shall be with you in three days . . ."

AT THE SIGN OF THE PELICAN

By EDMOND GLESSNER

THE little town of Zonderlicht lies between Termonde and Ghent, on the banks of a canal bordered with poplars. In the roads leading in from the country to the centre of the place the houses, which are at first separated by gardens, gradually draw nearer together until at last they stand shoulder to shoulder; and then the double line of their fronts debouches on to the Grand Place, which is surrounded by ancient dwelling houses on three sides, the fourth being occupied by the church, the gilded clock faces of the tower of which seem to gaze out at the horizon over the red-tiled roofs.

The population has always displayed great respect for the town authorities: for the Burgomaster, who has represented it in the Belgian Senate for over thirty years, and for the Dean, who has always been credited with possessing occult and powerful influence. All the inhabitants love money as much as they fear God, but the two sentiments, instead of contradicting each other, have always been in perfect agreement, for the consciences of the people of the town have never experienced difficulties in regard to the two matters.

They live, as a matter of fact, in a sturdy ignorance, of which the first elements were taught to them in their chosen schools, and which were fostered by the clergy for their good. They have also been brought up to hate France, which is, as everybody knows, the scourge of Europe and the home of every existing vice, since the passing of the law for the separation of Church and State. For the rest, the town of Zonderlicht consists of very worthy people, who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow and multiply, as the Scriptures ordain.

The local political meetings and the gatherings of the St. Cecile Musical Society for many years always took

place at the *auberge* known as the "Pelican," which stood on the outskirts of the town, overlooking the canal. It was an old, one-story house, covered with a tiled roof, rounded like the hull of a barge. Over the door a sign in sculptured stone, wounded by the insults of time, represented the symbolic bird, tearing its breast in order to feed its young.

To the right of the cabaret were the stable and shop, for Pieter Doorslaer, the proprietor of the establishment, also carried on business as a dealer in flour and chemical manure. He was credited with having made a substantial fortune, and when from time to time he left on a trip to Antwerp, where his son had established himself in an *auberge* of his own, people said, as they followed his departing footsteps:

"There's Doorslaer off again to his lawyer, to invest some more money!"

He was a big man, whose pepper and salt hair lay flat on a forehead that was wrinkled with stubbornness. He had small eyes bored in at the base of a pointed nose, which was slightly crooked at the end and which gave a cunning and shifty expression to his face. His wife, dried up and wrinkled, had the same ferocious love of saving money as himself.

When the war broke out, Doorslaer turned pale with terror and completely lost his head. What? Belgium in alliance with France? That was something which he could not comprehend. What completed his amazement, however, was to hear the curé launch from his pulpit a furious diatribe against France and counsel mothers of families to hide their daughters if the armies of the Republic should enter the town. However, when it was made known by the newspapers that the Prussians burned with still more dreadful passions, and that in addition they made a practice of burning down the houses, after massacring the inhabitants, everybody began to hope the French would arrive first.

Pieter Doorslaer wished for neither the one nor the other. He feared the requisitions that would be made, and wept over business conditions, which were going from bad to worse.

As a matter of fact, the Germans, who were spreading over the whole country, were preparing to besiege Antwerp, whither the Belgian Government had retired. Foreseeing that Zonderlicht would be occupied before long and that the stock of flour filling his warehouse might be requisitioned, Heaven knows at what a price! the innkeeper transported his sacks to his son's premises at Antwerp.

He found his son in a worse temper than his own. The Antwerp cabaret keeper's anger had not cooled down since the military authorities had decided to resist the Germans to the end, even if it resulted in the bombardment of the city. He had just finished the construction of a house in which he had invested all his savings. It was a house built in style, with a magnificent façade in which the yellow bricks were framed in with white stone, which was enriched with belts of many-coloured majolica. There were here and there decorative *motifs* in bronze green, while the gables had gilded ornaments standing out from them, like those on the hearses used in the city at funerals. It is in this way that an unknown artist sometimes succeeds, without even suspecting it, in creating a work which synthesises the genius of a whole nation.

At the idea that a shell might blow the inside out of his house the cabaret keeper fumed with indignation.

"Why not surrender the city before it is bombarded?" he argued. "The Government must needs poke its nose into this squabble. It's a shame!"

His father, prudent by nature, especially when it was a question concerning the authorities, contented himself by nodding his head and compressing his lips with a gloomy air.

When Pieter returned home after his last journey to Antwerp, the cannon were already growling on the horizon. Pale with fright, he shut himself up with his wife in the kitchen.

Near the fireplace was a deep alcove, in front of which hung a cretonne curtain. This was where the peasants slept. After supping on bread and potatoes, both listened to the dull rumblings that continued to be heard from the distance, and at times they exchanged frightened looks.

Fox, their aged dog, sensing that they were upset, jumped out from under the kitchen range, where he generally slept, and came and rested a paw on the knee of his master, who turned him away with a kick; then he went to caress the woman in the same way, but she did not even look at him. Then he returned to his place under the stove, shivering all over, for the dog was very old.

He was a small black dog, with a pointed nose and big eyes on a level with his head. For many years he had gone about the country in the innkeeper's wagon, running in front of the horses, whom his barking excited, rolling in the sweet-smelling grass of the ditches, and then taking a nap in the warm sun on the seat of the vehicle, the driver of which, who was his sworn comrade, slipped a cushion under his belly when he saw the beast was tired. Now that advancing age had stiffened his legs and blinded his eyes, the old dog seldom left the house, where he received more kicks than titbits.

During the following week a detachment of Belgian soldiers arrived at Zonderlicht, and ten of the men came to lodge at the "Pelican." They were sun-burned and dusty. Three of them wore tattered uniforms, and the corporal who commanded them wore ragged shoes made largely of rope.

The innkeeper wanted them to sleep in his warehouse, which was empty, but they asked for beds, assuring him they would pay for them. When they asked for something to eat, Doorslaer, rendered suspicious by their dilapidated equipment, put on a grief-stricken look and began to whine:

"I'm very sorry, but I've nothing left now. They've taken everything away from me. The people from Antwerp and Ghent have taken the bread out of our mouths. Why don't you go into town? Perhaps you'll still be able to get something there . . ."

"Oh, you needn't be afraid we shan't pay you!" interrupted the corporal; "we've plenty of money!"

And he drew a handful of silver from his pocket. As the other continued his whining, however, the corporal rose with a furious air:

"Look here, you jolly well serve us right away, or I'll give the men permission to start looting the place!"

And, turning to his comrades he said:

"That's the only way to get anything out of him! These peasants are all alike! Good heavens, what a lot!"

These men had been fighting before Liège, where the poor people of the district had come right out under the enemy's fire in order to furnish them with necessaries. The memory of those glorious days, when the courage of the population had been equal to the heroism of the soldiers, was alone sufficient to keep up their hearts; and when they spoke of General Leman he seemed to be still with them, like a banner. Now they had been fighting night and day for weeks against picked troops, before whose numbers they had been compelled to fall back, without, however, causing their courage to weaken. And above all they had had to protect themselves continually against the rapacity of the peasantry, who for the most part appeared to regard the war only as an opportunity for profiteering. And the poorest were not always the most eager for gain!

After giving his wife a hint to listen to the conversation of the young men, the innkeeper went out to his stable, whence he returned with a satisfied look on his face and announced that one of the shopkeepers had just sold him some ham and some eggs.

"Shall we ask them if they want any wine?" insinuated the woman. "They've plenty of money! I think I heard one of them say he was a doctor's son, and that another of them is a tradesman's boy!"

They took only some beer, however, and some brandy.

At ten o'clock the men went upstairs to bed, where they shared between them the three beds and some mattresses which they spread on the floor. Having wished them good-night, Doorslaer went down to close the shutters of the house and remained for a few minutes in the road to look at a fire whose gleams lighted the horizon.

Returning into the inn, he was beginning to count his day's takings when there came a knock at the door. He hastily shut the till and placed the key in his pocket, and then grumblingly opened the door.

Outside stood six German soldiers. They put their hands to their helmets and were inside the coffee-room before the innkeeper, who was trembling in all his limbs, could utter a single intelligible syllable. He felt more reassured, however, when he saw them in the light of the lamp that was burning on the counter.

Emaciated, dejected, with lifeless eyes, they dragged their feet painfully. They fell down on their chairs, rather than seated themselves, and one of them, a big, red-headed fellow who spoke French, asked for something to eat and drink.

The peasant, whom prudence counselled to show no uneasiness, immediately hastened to find them the best that he had, and placed on the table three bottles of Bordeaux and a box of grapes. He busied himself around them with the grimace of a courtier, but the Prussians did not even appear to see him. They ate in silence, with eyes half closed, and swallowed the wine with violent gulps. When they had emptied the three bottles, they asked for more. Then they sent down the grapes, a bunch at a time. Each time that they exchanged a few words, Doorslaer bowed his head with a smile that badly concealed the agony he felt. He was terrified that one of the Belgians might come downstairs before his customers had gone.

Already, however, they were wiping their moustaches with the tablecloth, while one of them was saying, with a sanctimonious air:

"Now, you must find us somewhere to sleep!"

Doorslaer started, as if he had received a blow on the head. After a slight hesitation, he explained that his three beds were all occupied by visitors. The Germans at first appeared to be annoyed, and then declared that they would be satisfied with some bundles of straw in a room where they could lock themselves in.

There was evidently no means of getting rid of them, unless he wished to excite their suspicions, or their anger. The innkeeper therefore assured them that he would have everything ready for them in a few minutes.

He returned from his warehouse, where he had prepared them some bedding, when one of the Germans, who had gone out into the vestibule for a moment, came back with

a frightened air and said a few words to his comrades, who immediately seized their guns. He had caught sight of the Belgians' shoes and gaiters, which were lying on the kitchen floor.

"Have you got some Belgian soldiers here?" asked the big, red-headed man, pressing the barrel of his rifle against the innkeeper's chest.

Doorslaer began to tremble and betrayed himself by his pallor.

"How many are they?"

"Ten."

"Armed?"

"Yes."

"Sit down there, with your hands up, and don't move a hair!"

The Prussian conferred in a low voice with his companions, keeping a close watch on the innkeeper meanwhile. Then he came back to where the man was sitting.

"You are going to put us up in your warehouse, and you will wake us at four o'clock. Do you understand?—four o'clock. At the same time you will bring us some coffee, and some bread and butter and some eggs."

Then, lowering the barrel of his rifle, he added:

"And mind you don't say a word to anybody—to anybody, mind—till we've been gone a couple of hours! We shall be coming back soon with the whole army, and if you speak it will be as much as your life is worth! And don't forget that if there is any trouble during the night, we'll burn your house down!"

Doorslaer wiped his forehead, where the perspiration stood in beads.

"Don't be afraid!" he said. "Nothing will happen during the night!"

As soon as the Germans had locked themselves in the warehouse, the innkeeper, without making a sound, went upstairs to the room where the Belgians were sleeping. He looked carefully through the keyhole, and then pressed his ear closely against it. Nothing! Then he went down to his wife, who was waiting for him by the fireside.

After he had explained the situation to her, she began to

think it over, with one hand resting on her lips, which trembled with fear.

"If these Germans are here," she said, "it is because their army is not far away. No doubt it will be here tomorrow."

"Let us hope ours will fall back without fighting. If they don't there will be houseburning and massacres!"

The old woman looked straight in front of her, with eyes that bulged with fear.

"Will these Germans pay for what they have had?" she asked.

"What do you think?" the man retorted, ironically.

"Then why did you give them wine and grapes?"

"So that they should not make any trouble for us."

They remained motionless for a moment, without saying another word. A small lamp was burning on the table between them. Its light threw grotesque shadows of the pair on the roughcast of the walls, where bunches of herbs, strings of onions and garlic hung from nails.

"It is after eleven o'clock," said the man. "We shall have to be up at half-past three to make the coffee."

While his wife was undressing, he went, as he did every evening, to stop the clock for the night, to postpone the wearing out of the cords from which the weights were hung.

"Aren't you coming to bed?" asked his wife from the depths of the alcove, where her cadaverous face lay on the pillow.

"No," he replied, "I'm afraid I shan't wake in time if I do."

"Put out the lamp, then! There's no use in burning oil for nothing!"

Silence fell on the room filled with darkness. A mouse was heard running along the laths in the ceiling. Fox, awakened by the sound that no doubt reminded him of the joyful hunting of former days, sighed under the stove, the bars in the front of which sent out a ruddy glow on the stone floor.

The old woman, who was mumbling her prayers, interrupted them to say:

"If we tell the Belgians, perhaps they would give us some money for letting them know the Prussians are here?"

"Before surrendering they would set fire to the place. . . . I wonder why they bound me down not to say anything until they have been gone a couple of hours?"

"Why, so that the Belgians shan't be able to overtake them, of course!"

"Or so that they will have time to come back here with reinforcements . . ."

The woman sprang up in bed, the sheets falling down to her knees.

"Do you think that was why?" she whispered.

"Why not?"

"But if they start fighting here, they will destroy everything!"

And as she thought of all the hard work and desperate saving by which they had paid for their house and furniture, she began to weep and snivel beneath the bed clothing.

At this moment the moon rose above the stable and threw a beam of pale light into the room, where it broke on the corner of the wardrobe and spread powdery gleams along the walls. Shortly afterward there was the sound of a footstep on the floor above. Doorslaer rose with a start and went into the hall, with his heart beating till it shook his whole frame.

A bedstead creaked, as if a sleeper had got back into it. Then all was silent again. And the night watch continued.

The peasant, who drowsed on the table with his head on his arms, went every now and then to listen at the foot of the door, the dark square of which for the first time frightened him; or he looked cautiously at his watch, by the aid of the flame from a match, which he scratched against the wall, where the phosphorescent mark made by it slowly died out.

At three o'clock he roused his wife, who had not slept, and they began to prepare breakfast for the Germans.

"Seeing that we stand very little chance of being paid," he said, "put margarine on the bread, and cook only cold-storage eggs."

"That was my idea, too," she replied. "How many eggs for each of them? One is enough, anyway?"

They looked at each other, and both hesitated; then

fear got the better of avarice, and the husband replied:
"Give 'em two!"

When everything was ready, he went to knock at the door of the warehouse. There was some rustling of straw, and then the sound of voices and footsteps. The door half opened, and a rifle barrel appeared, followed by a huge head that leaned to the right and then to the left before it was withdrawn. The other soldiers were behind, their arms in their hands.

"Are they still asleep?" asked the big, red-haired man, pointing in the direction where the Belgians were lodged.

"Sleeping like the blessed. They were as tired out as you were!"

The big German repeated the reply to his comrades, who began to laugh at the idea that they had passed the night practically under the same roof as their enemies. Then they began to eat by the light of a lantern which the inn-keeper had hung to the wall, the flame from which threw gleams on the straw of the bedding.

The Germans asked finally, before leaving, in what direction and what distance they would find a wood, and then took themselves off, after thanking their host with much politeness, but without troubling to make any more substantial payment.

"Well, are they gone?" asked the woman, when her husband returned to the kitchen.

"Yes."

"Did they pay?"

"No."

Anger pinched the nose of the peasant woman, whose eyes assumed a spiteful expression:

"What, nothing? Not a centime?"

"Why, no, nothing!" retorted the husband, impatiently.

"And you let them have five bottles of wine and a box of grapes!" she retorted. "Well, I wouldn't have been so stupid as to do that!"

"Will you shut up about your bottles of wine? None of it would have happened, if it had not been for your fault!"

"My fault?"

"Yes, your fault!" he insisted. "If you had locked the

door of the kitchen, they wouldn't have seen the Belgians' gaiters, and they wouldn't have threatened me!"

Bending her head, the old woman began to weep into her apron:

"Whatever is going to happen to us, if things go on like this? That's another fifteen francs lost?"

"Fifteen francs!" growled the Fleming, striding backwards and forwards and clenching his jaws. "Ah, the pigs! And this is only the beginning of it!"

Meanwhile the old woman placed bread and butter and a couple of bowls of coffee on the table. Holding the steaming bowls in their gnarled fingers, the couple ate in silence, sitting face to face, without appearing to see each other, each dreaming broken-heartedly of the money that had been stolen from them.

A jovial smile lighted the face of the innkeeper, however, when he heard the Belgians moving about in their rooms.

"Get their breakfasts ready," he said to his wife, more cheerfully.

The meal was awaiting them when the young men came down.

"Good morning, boss! Did you sleep well?"

The peasant put on a frightened air.

"Sleep well? We've had a jolly lucky escape, I think!"

"How's that?"

"Guess who you have had in the house with you! . . . Six Germans!"

"Six soldiers?"

"Yes."

The young soldiers looked at each other with bewilderment, uncertain whether the good man was joking.

"They came in about eleven o'clock," he went on. "How did they know you were staying here? That's what I want to know! They wanted to go up to your rooms, and when I tried to stop them, they pitched into me and dragged me in to the store. I felt sure I was done for! The scoundrels! Finally they told me they wouldn't do anything to you if I would give them some money; and they took every penny I had got!"

"How much did they steal from you?" asked one of the soldiers.

"Oh, hundreds and hundreds! Every sou I had!"

The soldiers had been exploited since the beginning of the war with such cynicism that some of them remained suspicious even after they had seen the store, where the sight of the bundles of straw, the eggshells and a portion of a German newspaper, lying in a corner, suggested to them that the whole business was a carefully staged affair.

"It all seems to me rather like a put-up job," murmured the corporal. "Where did these Boches come from?"

"Deserters? Looters? Stragglers, perhaps? The Boches have been following us up pretty closely for some days past now!"

"I'm rather inclined to fancy it's all a plant fixed up by this innkeeper, to get a bit more out of us!"

He had this suspicion strongly confirmed when their bill was presented. The total was so high that his first thought was to insist on a reduction; but as some of his companions were inclined to believe the innkeeper's story, they paid him with a good grace, telling themselves that if they had been robbed once more, it had at any rate been by a fellow who knew how to talk.

After they had gone, the old woman, on entering the coffee room, heard her husband cursing behind his bar:

"The pigs! The thieves!"

"Who?" she asked, with renewed alarm.

"Why, the Germans!" was the reply. "If they had paid me, I could have added the cost of what they had to the Belgians' bill, all the same! There's so much more lost! Oh, this war! And we haven't seen anything of it yet! What's going to happen in the future?"

Wishing, no doubt, to justify his gloomy presentiments, the Prussians returned in force a few days later and occupied the town after a sharp fight. They shot Doorslaer without ceremony on the threshold of his inn, which they burnt down, after looting it. His wife, in trying to run away, fell head over heels into the canal, and sank like a stone.

A week later Antwerp surrendered, and their son hastened

to Zonderlicht, anxious concerning the fate of his parents, and impatient to tell them that his own house had been spared during the bombardment.

All that he found remaining intact in the ruins was the sign in sculptured stone, representing the "Pelican." It had fallen into the roadway, whence somebody had picked it up and thrown it among the rubbish, by the side of the carcass of little Fox.

The poor beast had howled throughout an entire night on the body of the innkeeper, and had afterwards died from starvation near the wreck of the stove, in front of which his old masters had given him so many kicks.

IS HE COMING?

By IVAN VAZOFF

THAT autumn an extraordinarily thick fog had descended on Vetren. It was moist, cold, and a fine persistent rain was falling. It seemed as if the whole sky were dissolving itself into icy water that impregnated the low-roofed houses of the village. And, in the sad, muddy street, there reigned constant noise and movement. Cabs drawn by skinny horses, ox-drawn carts heaped up with military baggage, peasants leading their spans, herds of cattle, filled the roadway. Amidst this disorder there filed noisily past a squad of recruits, some in uniform, some in coats of sheep-skin, leather outside, and most of them wrapped in rags of blankets they had turned for the nonce into waterproofs. Round their waists a cartridge belt, rifle on the shoulder adorned with a bunch of boxwood and supporting overfilled haversacks. The good youths were well nigh frozen; they had mud up to the knees and sleet was whipping their faces, but they sang all the same.

At the door of a drinking saloon stood a group of officers, travellers and peasants, gazing curiously at these muddy heroes.

On the village square were assembled women, girls and children, ill clad, shivering and blue with cold. They are waiting to accompany the men of Vetren who are due from Harmanly with their regiment, on their way by forced marches to Sofia, thence to entrain for the front.

"Ah, there is George's son! Good day to you, Tsvetko!"

"I see him . . . it is Ranguel passing by."

"And there is Nedlkin! John, your mother is here!"

Flowers are given quickly, tears are flowing down many cheeks, words are half swallowed . . . and the little band is passing on, has indeed passed on.

"Mother," shouts a little, red-cheeked girl, "there is Big Brother!"

"Brother Stoyan!" a seven-year-old child cries out in his turn; he is standing near the girl and points with his arm towards the soldiers.

"My son, my son!" sadly moans the mother.

A big, handsome lad with black eyes leaves the ranks for a moment, kisses his mother's hand, touches with his lips his sister and his little brother on the forehead, pins on his breast a flower a maid has given him, sticks another flower behind his left ear, then still singing, presses forward to catch up with his comrades.

"Good-bye, my boy! Good luck!" shouts the mother.

"Stoyan!" cries the maid.

But their voices are drowned in the noise. Stoyan is merged among the soldiers who become speedily lost in the fog.

The mother is looking still, but can see no more.

The young girl lifts up a corner of her apron and hides her face with it.

Back in her home, Stoyan's mother opens the ancient trunk, lifts the shirts and the linen and, quite at the bottom, finds a big wax taper. She lights it in front of the holy images and begins to pray in a low voice. . . .

At that very moment, guns were thundering near Drago-man.* It was on the fourth of November, 1885.

That night Mother Tsena dreamed a dream.

She saw an enormous cloud, and in the cloud the army was passing, and Stoyan was also passing. Holy Mother of God! What frightful sights be these! The cloud was stirred, the heavens trembled and the earth shook as if there were a battle. Stoyan disappeared in the cloud and was no more to be seen.

Then Tsena awoke. Around her all was dark, a pitch black night. Outside, the wind was howling violently. A battle. . . . Lord God, Jesus Christ! Protect him! Holy Mother of God! Have pity on Stoyan! . . .

She slept no more till dawn.

* A village near the Serbian frontier on the road from Pirot to Sofia. The first fight of the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885 took place in the vicinity.

"Father Peter, what means a cloud?" she asked the next morning.

"Clouds, Tsena, are of two sorts. There are clouds that bring rain and there are clouds that evaporate. Of which kind of cloud did you dream?"

She related her vision and Father Peter reflected.

He did not seem ever to have encountered such a cloud in his book of dreams. But when he saw the woman's anxious face, he said to her: "Have no fear, Tsena, your son is hale and hearty. The cloud means news. You will be getting a letter from Stoyan."

The mother's face cleared up at once.

Six days after, she got a letter through a volunteer, a friend of her son's, who was bringing back Serbian prisoners. The letter was from Stoyan. She took it quickly to the pope to have it read out to her. This is what was in the letter:

"I am writing this to tell you that I am alive and well and that we have beat the Serbs. Long live Bulgaria! I am well and Ranguel Stoinoff is well also and our cousin Demetrius is well. He sends his love to his mother. The Serbs sent us salvos and rifle fire but they are afraid of our Hurras! Tomorrow we cross the Pass of Drago-man. When we come back I will bring a present from Nish for Kina. I send you a franc for you to spend. I will show Radoutcho how the shells whistle. I greet you.

Your obedient son,

"STOYAN DOBREFF.

"Many kind things to Father Peter. I wanted to send him a Serb rifle, but had none to send. They carry a long way, but the Serbs are bad shots. Many greetings also to Stoyanka."

This letter greatly rejoiced Tsena's sorrowful heart. She ran as hard as she could to Stoyanka's parents where there was great rejoicing, too. But the gladdest of the lot was Radoutcho, who looked forward to the new way of whistling his big brother was to teach him.

Going out into the street, Tsena espied another group of

prisoners behind which marched a Bulgarian soldier. Oh, if it could only be Stoyan? She drew near at once. But it was not he. She wanted to ask the soldier whether he had news of her son, but her attention was attracted by the prisoners, for these were the first she had ever seen.

"My God!" she muttered. "Be these Serbs? They look decent people. How unhappy their mothers must be to feel they are so far away! Wait a second, lads!"

She rushed home and came back with a glass of brandy in her hand, shouting to the Serbs to wait for her, that she was bringing them a drink. The Bulgarian soldier who was guarding them smiled, and stopped his squad.

"Thanks, thanks!" said the grateful prisoners, warmed up by the good mouthfuls of "raki."

"Is there a drop left for me? Your health, Mother!" cried the Bulgarian, joyfully draining the glass.

"They are God's own children, Christians as well as we . . ." thought Mother Tsena, looking at the little troop disappearing in the distance.

Peace was signed.

Christmas was drawing near and the men were to be demobilised. Some of the Vetren lads were already back, but Stoyan was not among them. Indeed there was no news of him. Mother Tsena was growing anxious, and painful thoughts assailed her.

Days passed by; she went often to the door. Is that not some one knocking? Ranguel Stoinoff has arrived; then Dinkoff's son, and the brothers Stamatoff. She seeks them out and questions them, but they know nothing. Up to a certain time they had all seen Stoyan, then they lost sight of him.

"Mother, cousin Demetrius has arrived," her daughter Kina called out to her as she was going home. She went out again to see Demetrius.

"Good morning, Demetrius. Where has Stoyan remained?"

Demetrius knows nothing either. "Perhaps," he suggests comfortingly, "they have sent him beyond Widin and he will come back another way."

"Mother of God, where can my boy be?" she muttered.

She went to Stoyanka. At the door her heart was beating fast. Doubtless Stoyanka will tell her that she has heard from Stoyan, that he sends his love and will be home for Christmas. But Stoyanka gave no straight answer; she remained silent and her eyes were veiled with moisture.

The whole village was astir. They were expecting the first regiment to pass through on its way from the frontier. Just in front of Mother Tsena's house they have planted two trees, the branches of which are tied together in the middle to form an arch. Branches of sweet-smelling pine were brought down from the hills to adorn the trees and the arch, from which hung a sign brought all the way from Pazardjik: "Welcome to our brave warriors!" Round it a number of Bulgarian tricolor banners. A real triumphal arch.

The victorious troops duly arrived and passed through.

"Perhaps he will come later on; he will surely not spend Christmas in a strange locality. There are stragglers still trickling in one by one. There is still time for him to come before evening. He knows there are anxious hearts here waiting for him."

Thus thought the poor mother.

In the morning Tsena went to church early. She took the franc piece Stoyan had sent her and bought candles with it and lit them before all the images in the sanctuary. She looked less sorrowful on her return.

"Today is Christmas day, so he will surely come. . . . Holy Mother of God, send him back to me! My own dear angel. . . . Lord Jesus, help me!"

Her daughter Kina announced some other lads of the village had come in. The mother's expression grew darker.

"Go and meet your brother, as the other girls," she said to Kina angrily.

"I will go, too, Mother," said Radoutcho, and the two children went up the snow-covered street and, leaving the village, adventured along the open road. The mother remained at the door, waiting.

An icy wind was blowing off the hills and the heights, the valleys and the plains were deep in snow. A sad sky. Black flocks of ravens fly over the road or perch on the tree

tops. Here and there on the road that leads to the pass of Ichtinan, dark spots indicate the presence of groups waiting for the arrivals; maids and children and old women. For soldiers are still coming in, some singly, some in company. Kina and Radoutcho passed the first group, then the second and the third and went far along the road. They want to be the first to greet Stoyan. They will recognise him immediately despite the snow that is falling again and nearly blinding them. The road climbs up the hillock and loses itself on the other side. Kina and Radoutcho reach the summit where the wind is stronger and hinders them in their progress. Two snow-bedecked soldiers walk by. Neither of them is Stoyan.

"Are there any more soldiers coming up behind?" asked Kina.

"We have no idea, little one. Whom are you expecting?"

"Our brother." And the travellers passed on.

Kina kept on looking ahead. She is cold, shivers indeed, and Radoutcho is moaning, but Big Brother is coming, and they must meet him, otherwise mother might be angry or weep.

Next they saw a carriage with two people in it, well muffled up in warm clothing. Kina stood in front of the horses to bring it to a standstill. "Sir, are there any soldiers behind you?"

"I don't know, my little dove," replied the man, half lifting his fur-lined cap and gazing in astonishment at the little girl blue with cold. And the carriage drove on.

The two children remained as if rooted to the soil. Hours passed. The wind from the hills waxed ever mightier; it whipped the children's faces and lifted their clothes. Snow was whirling in great eddies around them, but they did not flinch. Their looks remained fixed on the horizon, seeking to discover some living creature. Suddenly Kina's heart leapt. Afar off, one could discern a troop of calvary advancing. What a lot of soldiers! Surely Big Brother must be among them! She waited motionless. The men rode up and passed by the children noisily, going on their way.

Kina signalled with her hand to two officers who were bringing up the rear:

"Captain!" she cried with tears in her voice. "Is our brother coming?"

The officers stopped and looked at her in amazement.

"Who is your brother?" asked one of them.

"Brother Stoyan, our brother Stoyan," shouted Radoutcho impatiently, astonished that this fine captain should not know that Stoyan was his brother.

"What Stoyan?" asked the officer.

"Stoyan of Vetren," replied Kina decidedly.

The officer said a few words in a low tone to his companion, then pursued his questions with interest: "Was your brother in the cavalry?"

"Yes, yes," answered the poor child, who did not understand the question.

"Well, he is not with us, my poor child. Get away home. You will catch your death of cold out here," said the other officer.

And, spurring their horses, the two of them rode on to catch up with their squadron.

Kina weeps and Radoutcho complains. Their hands and feet are numb with cold and their lips are quite blue. In front of them extends the road, quite deserted, right up to the village. Those who had come out to meet the returning soldiers have all gone home. It is darkening and the wind is increasing in violence. One can only see afar the cavalry troop riding off and the soldiers' merry song is wafted on the wind to the children's ears.

Kina and Radoutcho retraced their steps to the village.

Night was falling. Hands deep dug into their pockets, the two children were walking on in silence, thinking of their mother waiting for them on the doorstep.

The noise of a carriage with three horses sounded behind them.

"Please, Sir, are there any more soldiers behind?"

But the carriage drove by rapidly and in the darkness no one saw or heard them.

The snow was still whirling in eddies around them. It came from the West, from the battlefield, where, in the vineyards near Pirot, it had already covered Stoyan's tomb with a white shroud.

THE IMPRINT

By KAREL CAPEK

I

PEACEFULLY, endlessly, snow was falling on the frozen countryside. "Silence always falls with the snow," reflected Boura, who had taken shelter in a shed.

His isolation amid the vastness of nature made him feel both sad and solemn. So far as his eye could see, the earth was becoming simplified, unified, amplified, ordered into a succession of great white waves. It was unseared by the confused furrows of life. At first, the only movement in this universal silence, the downward fluttering of the snowflakes, grew slower, rarer, and ceased altogether. Timidly the wayfarer trod on the virgin snow, and felt it was strange he should be the first to mark a line of steps on the white expanse. Some one, however, is passing along the main road, a black, snow-spotted figure, walking in the opposite direction. There will be two lines of footprints now, running parallel, then crossing and bringing to this pure, unsullied place the first troubling mark of man.

The oncomer stops, his beard clotted with snow; he is contemplating attentively something over there, by the side of the road.

Boura slowed down and turned searching looks in the same direction; the two lines of footprints meet and stop side by side.

"Do you see that imprint over yonder?" the man asked, pointing to a footprint some six yards from the road they were both standing on.

"Perfectly. It is the footprint of a man."

"Quite. But where the devil does it come from?"

"Suppose some one must have gone by there," Boura was going to say, but he stopped, puzzled. The imprint was isolated in the middle of a field; there was no other before or behind; it was a sharp imprint on the white surface of the snow, but no footsteps led either to or from it.

"How is this thing possible?" he said in his astonishment, and made a movement as if to go near it.

"Hold on!" cried the man, stopping him. "You would just make a lot of other footprints around it and spoil it all."

He added in an irritated tone, "There must be some explanation for it. A solitary footprint is absurd. Suppose he had jumped from here into the middle of the field. That would account for the absence of other footprints. But who could have jumped so far and land on one foot only? He would have lost his balance; he would have had to have leant on the other leg; I imagine he would have had to have run a little, as one does when jumping off a tram when it is going. But here there is no trace of the other foot!"

"It is utterly absurd," said Boura, "for, had he jumped from here, he would have left traces on this road, and you see the only tracks here are yours and mine. No one has been here before us. The imprint of the heel is turned towards the road. The man who left it must have been going in that direction; had he been going to the village, he would have turned to the right. On this side there are only fields, and what the devil should any one be looking for in the fields at a time like this?"

"Excuse me, but he who placed his foot there must have left again some way or other. I maintain that since there are no other footsteps he cannot have left at all. It is logical. No one has gone by here. One must seek for some other explanation of the imprint."

Boura was exercising his thinking powers.

"There may have been a natural hollow in the earth or in the frozen mud, which the snow has covered. Or . . . wait a moment! There may have been an old shoe abandoned there which a bird has taken away since the snow began to fall. In that case there would be a spot, in the shape of a single footprint, where there was no snow. One must seek a natural explanation."

"Had the shoe been there before the snowfall, it would be a black spot, but I see snow in it."

"Perhaps the bird took away the shoe while it was still snowing or let it fall in its flight and picked it up again.

It cannot be an actual footprint; that is clearly impossible."

"I say, does your hypothetical bird eat shoes? Or make his nest with shoes? A small bird is not strong enough to carry a shoe. One must approach this problem from a broad starting point. I believe it really is a footprint, and, that, since it clearly did not get there in the usual way along the earth, it must have come from above. You suppose a bird: it is possible it may have been a . . . yes, why not? . . . off a balloon. Someone must have got himself suspended from a balloon and made this imprint with his foot just to pull people's legs. Don't laugh. I find it very awkward myself to have to imagine such fantastic explanations. . . . I declare I would be glad to know it is not the imprint of a foot."

The two men drew near to the footprint. No case could have been clearer. An uncultivated field rose in gentle incline from the road and the suspicious mark was almost right in the middle of it. The space between it and the road was virgin snow, bearing not the slightest indication of contact with anything whatsoever. The snow was smooth, soft and friable, there having been no sharp frost.

As to the nature of the mark, no doubt was possible: it was that of a big shoe, of American shape, with very broad sole and five nails on the heel. The snow had been cleanly pressed down and was quite unbroken, there was in the hollow no sign of fresh snowflakes, so the print must have been made since the snowfall had ceased. It was a deep, strong print; the weight that had been brought to bear in the making of it was superior to that of either of the two men examining it.

The hypothesis of a bird carrying a shoe dropped away into silence. Just above the place a tree extended a few thin branches still padded with snow, none of which had fallen off. Yet the slightest tremor would have sufficed for this snow to tumble down in packets. So the hypothesis of a drop from above had to be abandoned too. It was quite impossible to drop anything from above without displacing the snow from the tree.

The only hard, naked fact in the whole thing was the existence of the imprint.

Beyond, the white surface was unbroken.

The two men went up the slope and explored the summit of the ridge; on the other side the incline was equally smooth, of an equally unbroken white, spreading out far to another hillock, still larger and whiter. For miles around there was no sign of the second foot.

They came back and found the line of their own steps, neat and regular as if designed. Between the two tracks, in the center of a trodden circle lay, in cynical solitude still, that imprint of a powerful foot. They both felt an impulse to tread it under foot, to obliterate it, to get rid of it, but something seemed to keep them back.

Exhausted, confused, Boura sat down on a milestone.

"Somebody has been pulling our leg," he concluded.

"It's positively disgusting," said the other man. "The joke is too silly . . . and yet . . . but, great heavens, there are physical limits. This is sheer impossibility. . . . Tell me," he jerked out suddenly, "since there is but one foot, might it not be that of a one-legged man? Don't laugh at me; I know it is silly, but one must find some explanation. One's reason is called in question. It is an onslaught by . . . I don't know what . . . I am completely at sea. Either we are both mad, or I am having a waking dream, under the influence of fever . . . or else one *must* find some natural solution."

Boura gave his opinion pensively: "We are both mad. We are both looking for a *natural* explanation; we are clinging desperately to the most complicated, the most violently unreasonable suppositions provided they be only *natural*. It might be much simpler and indeed more . . . natural, if we were to say we are in presence of something supernatural. Then we would merely express our astonishment and go our several ways contentedly. We might even conceivably be satisfied."

"I certainly should not. If this imprint had served some great purpose, if it could have been of use to anybody, I would cheerfully lead the way and kneel down and cry: It is a miracle! But this thing . . . it is awful, it is idiotic, it is trivial. Why make a single imprint when it is so much easier to make the habitual track?"

"Let us suppose some one were to make a young girl to rise from the dead, here before your eyes. You would kneel down and worship. But before the snow on your knees had melted you would be saying to yourself: nonsense, it was a feigned death. Here, however, there is nothing feigned. Let us admit a miracle has taken place under simplified conditions, like some physical experiment."

"I may not believe in the kind of resurrection you speak of. But I, too, want to be saved. I, too, am waiting for a miracle, for something that will happen along and change the course of my life. It is not an imprint like this that could save and convert me; it will not solve my doubts. It does nothing but puzzle me. It is fixed there, in my brain. I cannot get rid of it. And yet I do not believe in it. A miracle might satisfy me, but this imprint merely marks a first step towards uncertainty. It would have been much better had I not noticed it at all."

For a long time the two men were silent. Snow began to fall again, with increasing force.

Boura started speaking once more: "I remember reading in Hume a passage relating to an isolated footprint in the sand. So this is not the first of its kind. There may be thousands of them, and we merely pass them by without noticing them because of our way of living by rule. Another man would have passed by this one without seeing it, never thinking that here was a kind of solitary oddity, that there are some things in this world that bear no relation to any other. Our footprints are all about alike, but you see this solitary footprint is larger and deeper than ours . . . When I get thinking about my own life, it seems to me that I recognise in it tracks that come from nowhere and lead to nowhere. It happens to one to learn or to feel of a sudden something which never had its like before, which never could have its like again. There are human things that are related to nothing, that always and in all places do nothing but prove their own isolation. I know of happenings that had no sequence nor consequence, that achieved nothing and helped nobody and that yet. . . . There are incidents that never recurred, that helped no one to live and yet were perhaps the most important events in one's

life. Have you not got a feeling that this imprint is the finest of any you have seen hitherto?"

The other man replied: "I am thinking of the Seven League Boots. Perhaps such footprints have been found before and perhaps people thought of that explanation. Who knows? Perhaps these other footprints are near Pardubice or Kolin. Perhaps the next similar ones will be in the neighborhood of Rakovnik. But I can also imagine that the next footprint is no longer on snow, but in the midst of a crowd, mixed up with some event or accident that has already happened or that may yet come to pass, in short that this footprint is one of a continuous series of such footprints. Suppose such a series. If the press had a perfect reporting system we might find in the police court or local or miscellaneous news the other footprints and thus trace out the unknown's journey. Some demigod on his rounds? Marching on incoherently, spasmodically. Some sort of guide, of leader, to be followed? We might then follow up the divine track step by step. That might be the way of salvation. All these things are possible. . . . It is terrible to think that here is one of these steps and that one cannot follow it up."

Boura started. He rose. The snow was falling ever more thickly and the trodden field, with its great central footprint, was being buried under a new layer of snow.

"I will never let this go," said the man.

"What? This imprint that is no more and never will be . . ." added Boura pensively.

And they went their opposite roads.

II

That evening, Boura was giving a lecture to the "Aristotelian Society." Although there was but a sparse audience, he was feeling exhausted and absent-minded. He felt his hearers were not convinced and that he would have to engage on a debate for which he had a vague antipathy. For a moment he listened to his own voice; it sounded thick and veiled to him, heavy in cadence and affected in accent. In vain did he try to correct and get it under control; he heard it with displeasure.

Then his audience embarrassed him. He had the sensation of their being on the other side of a wall from him, an infinite distance away, and he was angry with himself for his failure to get into mental relation with them. Their faces seemed all alike, annoyingly alike. The whole thing was so lifeless that he lost all sense of reality and was revolving in a kind of void which he could neither dispel nor fill with his words. He made an effort to concentrate on one or two of these faces; he recognised people he knew, but he felt himself a stranger to them and was even surprised at a thousand details about them that struck him for the first time. He said to himself, vaguely, while repeating his argument: "What is the matter? How is it I feel so indifferent to my own words?"

He had the ground plan of his lecture cut and dried; he was speaking fluently and unhesitatingly; he was expounding an opinion he had long held, that had come to him as an inspiration and had grown into a conviction. But today, listening to himself in the silence of that hall, he felt utterly estranged.

"Yet this is all true, that I am saying. Truth so naked and evident that it is no longer peculiar to myself," he thought from time to time. "I am only relating facts that have no relation to myself."

He remembered how familiar these ideas were to him, how much they had meant to him, long ago, when they had still been at the inspiration stage. He had suffered then from their instability; he had greeted each new argument as a valued personal friend; they made up the sum of his real being. Today, they were but abstract truths, something external, impersonal, with which he had nothing to do, something so inanimate that he had haste to be rid of it. The more he tried, the more his own words tortured him. They seemed so distant, so utterly different from their former meaning. And yet every one of these phrases was familiar and sounded in his ears with the heavy, almost painful tread of a repetition. His only thought was how to bring it to an end; he chose each word with a view to its being a short cut to the close. The audience was now hanging on his lips. Boura thought: "Now I have got

them. I will give them my proofs, submit my main reasons. Let there be no faltering now, no apathy."

Then, suddenly, he skipped a whole series of arguments and brusquely brought the lecture to an end, as if he had cut it with a knife. The Aristotelians were not satisfied; several speakers arose to put questions and submit objections.

Boura only half understood them; hearing his own ideas from the lips of others, they appeared still more unfamiliar and yet self-evident.

"What is the use of defending them?" he asked himself sullenly. "Since this bears no relation to me, since it is just truth and has nothing to do with my own personality." He was speaking with difficulty now, with artificial concentration, but he felt his arguments were going home and he was winning new adherents to his views.

"But they are not my views," he reflected with astonishment.

A new opponent sprang up: with tousled hair, he looked particularly ferocious.

He spoke combatively: "I beg of you to give us your definition of truth."

"This is not a noetical lecture," retorted Boura.

"Yet," persisted the man sarcastically, "it would interest me vastly."

"Don't get off the subject," shouted the Aristotelians.

The hirsute fellow smiled: "Excuse me, my question is relevant to the subject."

"Nonsense," growled the Society.

"The gentleman is perfectly right," said Boura.

"In that case, please answer," repeated the opponent.

Boura rose: "I beg the Society to close the debate."

The Aristotelians were astonished.

The President said: "It would be better to go on with the discussion to the end. I am only observing precedent in the Society, however, and have no desire to dictate to you."

Boura said brusquely: "I have nothing to add to my lecture."

The Aristotelians laughed.

The sitting had become a fiasco and the President had

to adjourn the meeting, which he did with the remark that he "regretted they had been deprived of the pleasure of discussing so absorbing a subject."

His throat dry and his mind empty, Boura ended by escaping. It was a mild winter evening, though snow appeared likely. The bells and the noise of the cars sounded muffled. Boura heard hurried steps behind him and slipped behind a tree. His follower, quite out of breath, stopped and addressed him rapidly:

"My name is Holecek and I recognised you in the course of the lecture. Do you remember me?"

"No," replied Boura somewhat uncertainly.

"Do you remember, last year, the imprint in the snow?"

"Ah, yes," said Boura, reassured, "so it was you! I am very happy, to . . . yes, really. I have often thought of you. Well, did you ever come across the other footprints?"

"No. Yet I looked hard. . . . But why would you not answer that last question at the meeting of the Society?"

"I don't know. I did not feel inclined to answer it."

"Listen. There is no harm in my telling you. You nearly convinced me. When that hairy fellow got up, I felt inclined to get up and shout to him: 'What? For a whole hour, Sir, you have been listening to truth, and you now ask what is truth? You have heard arguments to which no objection could be taken. There were no gaps or errors among them. Nothing from beginning to end that was not rational.' Why, then, not have answered him?"

"What would have been the use?" asked Boura contritely. "I know very well that all I said was self-evident, logical, just, anything you like to call it. But, when first I reasoned it out, it seemed neither evident nor logical to me. At that time, these ideas were so odd that they made me laugh occasionally. To myself I appeared mad. I was infinitely happy. Yet there was not one atom of reason in it all. I don't know where I got it . . . it was without object."

"Tracks that come from nowhere and that lead to nowhere . . ." Holecek suddenly recollected.

"Yes. Well, now I have built it up into a system, or perhaps into a truth. It is all beautifully clear and logical.

But—I don't quite know how to put it—it was finer, more marvelous, more miraculous in those days. Nothing came out of it then and it served no purpose. I knew one might have many ideas, different, even contrary, and all be just as beautiful and as amazing. I had the feeling of a limitless freedom. One cannot prove the opposite of perfection. But when I started making truth out of it, I felt it was all materialising. To keep one single thing: truth, it is necessary to have much evidence of the contrary. One must prove and persuade, be logical and clear. . . . But today, while speaking, I suddenly understood. I was in that instant nearer to something else, yet more perfect. And so, when that insistent madman asked me what was truth, I was going to retort that it is not truth that matters."

"That was better left unsaid," remarked Holecek politely.

"But there really is something superior to truth, something that does not fetter, but frees. There have been days when I have lived as in an ecstatic dream: how free I was then! Nothing seemed more natural than miracles. Miracles are merely freer and more perfect events than the others. They are the successful cases among thousands of failures and chance shots. How that imprint seemed familiar then! And, later, when I placed myself on the ground of reason, I hated it. Tell me. Did we really see it?"

"Yes, really."

Boura was exultant. "I am so glad to have met you again. At bottom, I was expecting you. Let us go somewhere for a drink. After that lecture my throat feels as dry as a country road. Just think of it, there were moments when I could see myself sitting down there, amid my own audience!"

The chance direction of their walk took them to a wine-cellar, which they entered. Boura was excited. He was talking a lot and poking fun at the Aristotelians, while Holecek twisted silently the stem of his glass between his fingers. Looking at Boura, he was saying to himself, "Well, anxious one, what in reality are you seeking? You have seen a miracle and that did not save you. You have known truth and did not submit to it. You have had great inspirations and they have not lit up your life for the

centuries to see. . . . Oh, could one but have wings! Winged spirit, what do thy wings help thee do save quit everything? Have neither home nor sleep? Launch out into the void to play with space and steep thy breast in nothingness? If I had been given a miracle, I should be saved. If I had been given to know truth, I should clasp it so hard! And if the tiniest of divine sparks were to fall upon me, would I not be as a chapel in which burns a lamp eternal? Were the Burning Bush itself to speak to thee, it could not save thee. But thine eyes are inflamed and thou wouldst recognise God in the bush, aye, even in the nettles, whereas I am deaf and blind and unable to see miracles! What you lack is an Egyptian prison that you might be saved by faith. But who could fetter thee, winged spirit of atheism?"

"Do you remember," said Boura, "last year, in connection with the imprint, your saying: 'Perhaps a god has passed by here, and one might follow him'?"

"No, no," replied Holecek, "one cannot find God by applying the methods of the detective force."

"By no method at all. One can only wait till God's axe cuts our roots. Only then will we come to understand that we are only here through a miracle and then we will remain fixed forever in wonder and in proper balance."

"And you . . . your roots. Are they already cut?"

"No."

A man rose from a table in the corner and walked towards them. A big, strong man, with a broad face, red hair, an open and thoughtful expression. He stood in front of them, head slightly to the side, and was contemplating Boura as if from afar.

Boura was astonished:

"What's the matter?"

The man made no answer. His eyes gave an odd impression of drawing nearer, becoming more attentive, more penetrating, more searching. Suddenly he spoke:

"Are you not M. Boura?"

Boura rose.

"I am."

"Have you not got a brother?"

"Yes . . . I have one . . . abroad, I don't know where. What do you . . ."

The man sat down at their table. He started vaguely:

"Well, it's just this, you see . . ." Then, suddenly raising his eyes, he said:

"I am your brother."

Boura felt an immense confused joy.

"Really you? Really?"

The man was smiling.

"Yes, really. How are you?"

He was using the more formal mode of address, instead of the second person singular usual among brothers or intimate friends.

"You . . . Why do you speak like that?"

"Lack of habit, I suppose," replied the man with an attempt at a cordial smile, but his face remained watchful. With his finger he sketched out the contour of Boura's features:

"Mother," he said, "Mother all over . . ."

"I should never have recognised you," Boura went on eagerly. "My God, after all these years. Let me have a good look at you. You are like Father . . . yes, like Father."

"That is quite possible."

Boura was rejoicing. "What luck! It is by sheer chance we came in here, I and . . . my friend Holecek."

"Delighted, Sir," said the man with dignity, tendering Holecek his large, hot hand.

"And, what are you doing?" asked Boura, with a certain hesitation.

"Nothing. I am on a business journey. I have a thing on hand over there, in the South, an industrial undertaking. I just thought I would take a turn round here in our own countryside."

"True . . . you have not been here since our parents died. The old home has been pulled down and they have set up something in its place, a school I think, something ugly anyway, a brick building. I went in and they asked me what I wanted there. The people were so stupid; seemed to know nothing at all. But, opposite, there still

stands the wee house . . . that height," and he made a gesture of indication. "I don't remember who . . ." Boura was searching his memory.

The redhaired man bent towards him, evoking memories, energetically, his eyes staring and drawn together in concentration of thought:

"It was . . . let me see . . . Hanousek, yes, Hanousek the beggar who lived there!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"With his daughters," added Boura joyfully.

"That's it. They had small reddish eyes . . . and I used to eat there."

"Hallo! I did not know that!" said Boura in surprise.

"Yes. They toasted bread for me, all the old beggar used to bring home, crusts, remains, beans . . . all sorts of horrible things. I ate them all. Then I used to lie down on the beggar's bed and feed his bugs."

"So that's how we often had such trouble in finding you," said Boura with a smile.

"No, when you called me, I was generally buried in the tall grass on the top of the ridge. No one knew that place and I had a regular hare's den there from which, far down, I could see our house. I could see Mother go out and call me, hear her weep for love and anxiety. It gave me a sensation of wickedness and sweetness together. Not for the world would I have given sign of life. I was afraid she might see me and yet I made signs to her. I only wanted to show myself just a little, not enough for her to recognise me."

"Yes, she used often to search for you."

"Aye, often. I wanted to try, to see whether she would search. I crouched in my hole, holding my breath, waiting for her to come. She called, she searched, but she no longer cried. Then, one day she never came out at all. That day I waited till evening, although I was rather afraid alone up there. But she did not come, and I never went back to the ridge after that. I started wandering further afield."

"Where are you living now?"

"In Africa. I thought no one cared for me. That is why I set out wandering. I wanted to see whether anything would happen to me. That was the kind of sensation

I liked. Then, at home, no one ever spoke to me and I used to go and talk with the stonebreakers. Old Hanousek never spoke, he only swore a little. But his daughters talked a lot, and so gently . . ."

Boura, somehow, was almost intimidated. "What did you do then?"

"Well . . . what?"

But the redheaded man was thinking.

Boura waited sullenly. Perhaps he would speak of his own accord. So much time, so vast a distance, had separated them that endless words would have found it hard to bridge the abyss.

He was thinking: "See, brother, we will stay for years thus, side by side, talking of trivial everyday things, all we know. An infinite number of trivialities is required for men to understand each other." But the big brother was content to sit and smoke, and spit and stare at the floor. A childish feeling awoke in Boura: "It is he, the big brother who can do what he wants and who possesses secrets. I should like to know all he has done, but he will not tell me all. I should like to tell him all I have done, but he will not ask me. Ah, never will I get to understand him!

"How many times have I not seen him come home with absentminded, sated, mysterious face, like a cat that has just greedily and cruelly eaten up a bird in the loft and comes back dirty, conscious of crime, with flashing eyes! How many times I went to the places you had just left to see what you had discovered or what you were hiding there, and, having searched every corner, found only the reverse side of things!

"Today, again I see you with the old remembered expression. Again you come home, mysterious now as then, like the cat rolling over in its mind the memory of past delights while getting a foretaste of future escapades."

"Well," suddenly said this big brother, as if relieved, "I must run. I am very, very happy to have seen you." Boura rose in some confusion.

"I too, have been very glad. But remain a little while. We have not seen each other for so many years!"

The big brother was taking up his overcoat.

"Yes, that's true . . . many years. Life is a long business."

The two brothers were standing, embarrassed, not knowing how to take leave of each other. The big brother bent his head as if seeking something, some good, pure word. He was making an effort to smile, he was moving his lips quietly.

"Do you need money?" he suddenly said. "I have enough."

"No, no," replied Boura, moved and happy, "no, thank you, it is not worth while. But it is nice of you all the same. God be with you!"

The big brother grumbled hesitatingly: "Come, why not? I don't need it myself. Well, as you like. Then, good-bye!"

He was going away, tall and straight. Holecek followed him with his eyes as far as the door and saw his last farewell gesture.

Boura had lowered his eyes.

"He has forgotten his stick," said Holecek, and ran to follow the departing one. Besides, he was glad of an excuse to leave Boura to himself for a moment. He heard footsteps in the staircase above him.

"Here! Sir!"

Only two leaps and he had climbed to the entrance door, but the street was empty as far along as he could see. A wet snow was falling that melted on touching the ground.

Astounded, he looked in the lobby. Nothing. Two figures detached themselves from the wall: two policemen.

"Has some one not just rushed out?" asked Holecek, quite blown.

"What has he stolen?"

"Nothing. Where did he go to?"

"Nobody went out," said one of the policemen. "Since we have been here no one has come out of the cellar."

"We have been here fully ten minutes," volunteered the other.

"He must be within still."

"No!" retorted Holecek. "He was just in front of me. He had forgotten his stick."

The policeman repeated profoundly, "His stick. No, no one came out."

Holecek was getting angry: "But a man cannot disappear like that!"

"You are right, there," the policeman said in a conciliatory tone.

"Better get back inside," said the other, "it is snowing."

Holecek understood; they thought him drunk, but he had hardly drunk one glass. What can this new mystery be?

He repeated his explanation, irritably: "He was just in front of me. He cannot have vanished like that, yet had he gone out you would have seen him, would you not?"

The policeman took out his notebook.

"Now don't start any nonsense," said Holecek. "What are you going to do?"

"One does not know what may not have happened. An accident, or else, maybe a . . ."

Holecek bit his lips with rage.

"If that were all!" he cried, slammed the door and went down again. Boura was sipping out of an empty glass. He had hardly noted Holecek's absence. He was in a brown study.

"Your brother has disappeared," announced Holecek, all atremble with cold and emotion.

"Just like him," commented Boura, shaking his head.

"Excuse me," said Holecek impatiently. "He was going up the stairs and suddenly vanished. He did not go out: he simply disappeared as if the earth had swallowed him up."

"Just so . . . as if the earth had swallowed him up. Just like him. He used to go, and no one knew whither, and then come back with a curious, careworn expression, as if he had seen more things than his philosophy could understand."

"The Devil! But listen to me. He did not go. He vanished. In the lobby. Two policemen were standing at the door and did not see him go out."

"An original . . . from childhood up. Always been like that . . . yes, solitary, odd, terribly inconstant, cruel, absorbed. You see you don't know him."

"But how is it you do not understand . . ." Holecsek was giving himself a lot of trouble. "He disappeared like a shadow, as if he had passed through the wall."

"I quite understand. Always lacked balance, in everything, always inconstant. He never enquired whether a thing was allowed, as if he had neither conscience nor limits. How many times did he not astound us!"

"But is it possible to vanish?"

"I don't know. My brother is not learned, has no notion of science, no idea of what is possible and what is not possible. Truly, he always showed supreme contempt for all instruction."

Holecsek banged the table with his fist.

"Is it then of no moment?"

"What is of moment?" asked Boura calmly, raising his eyes.

"No man can vanish . . . you see . . . there are . . ."

"Physical limits, you were going to say. Yes, I know. You had already told me so in connection with the imprint on the snow. Physical limits! Set great store by them, eh? See here: I have seen many things and read about many more, and of the lot the thing I understand best of all is the resurrection of the daughter of Jairus. I have seen a dead girl. . . . Oh, in this miserable world of machinery one single thing were truly natural: the supernatural, a miracle. That alone would answer to all man has most deeply . . ."

"Miracles, yes, that's all right," said Holecsek. "To save some one, to cure the sick, above all to give life again to those who have died young. . . . But of what use is what I have just witnessed? Whom does it profit? If there is a miracle, why has it no purpose? Nothing comes out of it . . . nothing."

"And even supposing nothing did come out of it . . . it remains a miracle all the same. In ourselves too, there happen things at times that serve no obvious end . . . except their own perfection. They are unexpected bursts of freedom . . . even though they last but an instant. If events were shaped as is natural within our souls, miracles would happen all the time!"

THE MAIDEN

By JOHANNES V. JENSEN

IN Vesterude, in Himmerland, on the northeastern coast of Denmark, along the fjord, lie four large farms. A couple of hundred years ago a free manor lay here. It was called Strandholm. It is a desolate and sparsely populated region. For generations the squires of Strandholm went in for cattle raising and most of the estate consisted in mile-long meadows billowing down by the fjord. The land that lay higher up was rather barren and sandy and not much was done with it.

The people who occupied Strandholm were always more or less unsociable. This was because they lived in such a lonely spot and had to go so far to meet others. In looks and habits they were not very different from the peasants in the district; they were perhaps a trifle more abrupt because they were free born and prosperous, but on the whole they followed the ways of the district and kept their feet on the ground like most plain folks. They were tall, phlegmatic people whom one usually met in the open with huge boots on and surrounded by a pack of dogs. The last one to own the manor whole and undivided was Jorgen Dam. He read and wrote a great deal and traveled abroad. When he grew old he divided the estate between two sons so that the property was divided into two equal parts, Northern and Southern Strandholm. The brothers got on pretty well together. They went in more for farming, and as the enterprise was cut into half, on each estate, the brothers as a matter of course adopted an even plainer way of living than that of their ancestors. And gradually the fact that the family was noble was almost forgotten. The hard times which followed in the wake of the Swedish wars hit the brothers badly and each had all he could do to keep things together.

Meanwhile both had children. And from the time when the children were quite tiny both brothers became fired with the holy idea of uniting the two estates into one, by marriage. And it looked as though they would succeed; as the children grew older two of them seemed to form a couple, quite naturally. The other children on the estates have nothing to do with this story, their lives unfolded beyond the borders of Strandholm. But the son Matthew on North Strandholm, Squire Matthew, as they called him, and little Bertha on the other estate, became each other's fate. Matthew soon grew to be his father's favourite, and Bertha likewise, and the two cousins seemed also from the time they were very small to have a predilection for each other. The first time they saw each other, in their infancy, when as babies they were placed together on a large table, they both clasped each other passionately with their small arms. During their childhood they were always allowed to be together, and they were petted and humoured in every way. They grew up and began to resemble each other. They became very handsome, took much more pride in their appearance than their sisters and brothers, and were much more restless. Their childhood was long and carefree, an eternity of freshness and sweetness spent in the hot sunny moors or among the heaping sand dunes, in the fields with the deep furrows, or on the silent, deserted beach. What no one else saw, the two children were familiar with. The sharp, barren sand drifts became in their hands precious treasures of tiny, tiny gems in myriads of evanescent and almost unreal hues; the moors and the fields were to them worlds teeming full of creatures with which they were on the best of terms, beetles, lizards, toads, swallows and minnows; every year they would pick out, here or there, a nest they called their own which they would visit, in the twilight, to pick up the warm eggs and hold them in their hands, for a few moments while the mother bird, a lark or a grouse, would hover on the ground near by and eye them complacently. They were almost always in the open, above them always stretched the great, endless sky.

If one were to say that one sound, above all others,

stamped their youth and for all time revealed them to themselves, then it was the cry of the sea swallow which rang almost unceasingly over the low land bordering on the beach and the moor, and which always came from a much greater height and a much greater distance than that of any other birds.

One sea swallow or another would always soar, alone, high up into the sky and cry so restlessly and so bitterly, so familiarly and yet so mysteriously. *Geerak!* The slender, snow white bird that soared in the long but not assured wing strokes, the bird which seemed to have nothing to say but which never seemed able to remain silent in its flight from the deserted fjord to the lonely moor, and back again, crossed the sky of their happy childhood.

The two children were almost fully grown when they became orphans. Their parents died at almost the same time, convinced that the two estates would be united again so the family would rise to power. Within a short time the young people would marry, everything had been arranged and planned so well for them.

But then it happened that Bertha did not want Matthew.

It came as one of these sudden, inexplicable outbreaks in nature which spring from deep, hidden forces. Everything had been planned so carefully, and everything had turned out as it should. The other sisters and brothers had received their share of the inheritance and were provided for each in his way; Matthew and Bertha were of marriageable age, everything was ordered and in readiness through years of forethought—even the most ticklish problem of all had been settled: the two young people had great affection for each other—and yet Bertha broke everything off. Why? Had something grown up in her with the same growth as the decision? Had a secret dislike or a perverted desire to triumph borne fruit just as her happiness, according to all rules, was ripe? Did she in her inexplicable maiden heart have a feeling that she did not want to marry Matthew just because she loved him? Did she resist merely because of the tendency, common to all women, of contradicting just at the time when it is most unreasonable and may entail the most fatal consequences? Who

knows what a young and beautiful woman can think of? Bertha did not want to get married.

Squire Matthew roared with laughter, at first. Then he grew afraid and implored, sometimes raging and then again humble, sometimes dumb with amazement and then raving mad. He threatened and he wept. But Bertha dressed her fascinating person in black, as for a funeral, with large costly feathers and beautiful velvets and remained silent, silent. She thrived in her successful obstinacy and began to long for more sorrows and triumphs, she enveloped herself sensually with coldness and spiritual mysticism which found no outlet in words, she played at "being stranger"—but it was all frightfully serious. Squire Matthew could not understand her in spite of all laudable efforts, and as he loved her, and nothing else, it always ended by his losing his temper and giving himself up to a storm of wildness which made Bertha shudder and which she loved. When Matthew performed one of his terrible scenes she would stand there deathly pale and sweet and pretend she did not know what it was all about while all the squire's passionate feelings passed like scarcely noticeable reflections over her delicate, desirous features. Her eyes would seem to die sometimes, when the huge man threw himself on the floor in front of her, steaming with misery, but she maintained the greatest calm, simply stood there and moved her lips ever so slightly as if smiling wickedly or murmuring to herself, "I love him, I love him!" Eventually she called forth *his* frightful obstinacy; he left her in a rage, one day, wounded and impossible to tame again. In his spite he gave himself to the devil, did not come back, never came back.

And so they were not married.

And then began a strange life on the twin estates. Lady Bertha took the reins of the enterprise into her own hands, on her property, took them in such a way that everyone could see she intended driving into the ditch at once. In her childish wilfulness she managed the affairs of the estate in the most fantastic manner, just in order to have her own way, and things grew much worse when any of the family tried to help her. Finally a distant relative

turned up who with authoritative hand (Bertha gnashed her teeth but obeyed) got things into order. After that Bertha became subdued and behaved like a human being; she was able to manage the estate alone, fairly well. She was provided for, in this respect.

It was worse with Matthew, but not to begin with. At first he took good care of his property. But soon in his longing and his rage he began to carouse around on the neighbouring farms and at the village fêtes and markets, where he gambled and drank. In the beginning he carried on and fought more than he drank. But little by little he began to tope.

Some years passed, and both parties had put all ideas of marriage out of their heads. The two cousins never saw each other; they merely lived to gloat each day in the consciousness of never giving in, each one hoping in his heart that the other suffered bitterly, each one more and more resolved never to reveal his own misery and suffering. The situation, judging by outward appearances, was that Bertha managed her farm very successfully: she led a more and more retired life, directing the work on the estate. Squire Matthew, on the other hand, was scarcely ever home and his farm was shamefully mismanaged. The buildings began to crumble; one year the harvest was left to rot on the ground and the next year the land was not ploughed. As there was no fodder the cattle diminished, and when the Squire was unable to raise any more money he grew ashamed to meet people and began to stay at home on the farm, but without doing anything. He would go hunting or take a boat out on the fjord. The servants left him little by little; there was no one to cultivate the fields. And then at last Northern Strandholm began to lie entirely fallow; there were no people, no cattle. The whole district was barren and sparsely populated, but such a condition as that in Northern Strandholm no one had seen the like of. People couldn't get over it, and later on, when the Squire's story was told, this was always commented on, first. It was a crime, for aren't there enough poor people in the world who haven't a plot of land they can call their own? While here were hundreds of acres of land never touched

by the plough. It was strange to see how quickly a cultivated spot can grow wild again. The heather crept into the fields which had not already become a wilderness of thistles and brambles, of self-sowed wheat and weeds, all mixed up together. The roads leading up to the house sank in and grew so covered with greens that they passed through a thicket of grass and wild plants like in a churchyard. People used to talk a lot about the sinfulness of it all, but as there were not many people in the district, and as they did not meet very often, Squire Matthew was relatively soon forgotten. He sat as the only remaining creature on the abandoned domain. Gradually he was left all alone, without animals, even. He lived on hunting and fishing, if one could call it living.

One day some people who were driving a herd of cattle down the road saw a strange creature approach them from out the thistle fields of Northern Strandholm. He looked like a savage in a forest of beard and hair and old, tattered clothes. It was Squire Matthew. He did not want to speak to anyone; he calmly shot an ox in the herd and stood beside it, while the other cattle passed by. The drivers tried to protest but the Squire didn't answer, he merely pointed his gun at them until they went away. Squire Matthew cut a piece of meat out of the ox and brought it home. A couple of days afterward the sheriff and his men came to the desolate farm and found the Squire at home; he was lying in bed in the only room that was still livable. The floor beneath him was mire of soil he had brought in with his boots, for years, of dampness and mouldy viscousness. From the cracks in the roof hung the long roots of plants which were growing above. The windows were darkened by ivy and shrubbery in the garden outside. When the Squire, or the unrecognisable hairy creature supposed to be he, saw the men and heard what they had come for, he got up and dressed himself. He made an attempt to say something, but they could not understand him. He did not know how to talk. But when they tried to arrest him he seized his gun and explained with it what he meant. In the end the men had to go. When they came back again, armed and reinforced, Squire Matthew had vanished.

He was traced to Viborg a few weeks later where a robbery took place on the open road. Soon afterward he killed and plundered a pedlar on the Kolding road. This was the last anyone heard of him. He had left Denmark.

Northern Strandholm was then divided into two farms, and the neglected and abandoned fields were tilled and ploughed. But all connection between the estates which had been one, was over. The new owners of Northern Strandholm never saw Lady Bertha. She lived alone. And the years passed over her. As long as she was young a suitor would come along, now and then, but she turned them all away with scorn and disgust. Later on she was left in peace. She became rather peculiar. People called her, as the years went by, the "Maiden." Stories were told of her strange ways of living and of her fear of meeting people. She was not kindhearted; she never gave her servants a bit more than she could help while she was very particular about having every bit of work done. She lived in a large room on the ground floor and in the course of time surrounded herself with various animals: pug dogs, so round with food and old age that they would lie stretched out on the cushions without giving any sign of life; bald canary birds and cockatoos perched on swings and in brass cages; a collection of inexpressibly lazy cats and as her very best friend an old sheep that walked about the room and bleated whenever there was a change in the weather. Once upon a time it had been a little lamb, white as a summer cloud and so playful that it would jump right up into the air, with all its four small legs, but now it was blind and looked like a ragpicker's bag stuffed with wool and old bones. At last it toppled over and had to be fed from a bottle; it grew so old that a horn began to crop out in its forehead like a ram and it bleated with almost human voice when it was hungry. No one would have thought it was a sheep. Many people used to draw their own conclusion because the "Maiden" insisted on keeping the sad-looking animal; who knew with whom she had sealed a pact? But when the tame and faithful sheep finally died altogether, Lady Bertha repeated the experiment and adopted a new little lamb, in the spring, which also died of old age.

In the cemetery at Strandholm stands Lady Bertha Dam's large and handsomely chiseled tomb. It is strange to come across such a pompous monument in this barren region. As far as eye can reach the sand dunes stretch out, desolate, strewn with chalk-white flint pebbles which shine like small knuckles, and the church itself is white like a bone and lies so abandoned, now, that it seems to turn its wretched spire out toward the fjord, which is low and has no light or colour. And poverty stares out of the sad cemetery, there are so many nameless graves, oblong mounds covered with a whitish grass. The wind passes by like a stranger who breathes for himself, thinks of his long mission and travels on. A sea swallow circles in the sky, high up, soars stretched out, in its flight, as if it were too light for the air, and too helpless and disconsolate to fly. *Geerah, Geerah!* It is so bleak, here, so dreary. But right in the middle of the open churchyard stands Bertha Dam's fine monument. It is a high pillar of granite, polished like a mirror, and adorned with bronze ornaments of extravagant French style. It is crowned on top with four handsome bronze horns, like a double lyre. These refined outlines are silhouetted against the pale sky of Jutland. Almost brutally they call forth visions of milder conditions in some spot far South, where the most miserably conceived possibilities can spring to life, and where metal is moulded into happy forms.

Here rests Bertha Dam who for a generation and more went to church every Sunday and who went no other place. Every Sunday the congregation saw her bloodless, faded face back of the edge of the pew where her family had had its seat since the days of Arild. Here the Dam's coat of arms hung carved in wood and painted in azure blue, brick red and sulphur yellow. Here hangs an old portrait of the "Maiden" of Southern Strandholm. You can see her sit in her straight laced bodice, pointed like a cornucopia, with her ravaged nun's face imprisoned in a row of piped frills. Under her left arm is painted a sheep's head with yellow faunish eyes and a long, virtuous nose, in memory of the only creature Lady Bertha loved.

But it happened one Sunday that the congregation, to

its fear and astonishment, failed to see the "Maiden" in the pew. The service was disorganised, the minister wandered absent-mindedly because the dry old head with the obstinate expression was not as usual in its place.

Lady Bertha was certainly to be excused, that day. She, meanwhile, was pacing, wild and weeping, about her room. In the morning as she was driving to church as usual, and had reached the valley and crossed the river, she saw a rider rushing down the road from the country, headed for the Strandholm farms. She did not think anything of it until she saw another rider appear at the top of the hill in a mad gallop after the first one. Then she had told her coachman to stop. And as she soon realised that the first rider was a fugitive from justice, who had to be stopped, quick-minded and active as she was, she told her coachman to go down and tear up some of the planks of the bridge they had just crossed. The coachman obeyed and in a few moments had thrown aside a couple of boards so that the wretched bridge could not be crossed. Lady Bertha remained calmly by the roadside watching the rider make toward the river. He whizzed past the carriage—it was a man with long grey hair—and in the next moment she saw him turn his horse sharply to the side, when he realised the bridge was broken. He was not dressed suitably for the season, and he had a faded hat on his grey hair. When he couldn't cross the bridge he forced his horse out in the river beside it, but the animal stuck in the heavy mire and sank, kicking before it disappeared. The rider worked his way back to land over the animal's body. In the meantime the other rider had stopped his horse and dismounted. There were scarcely fifty feet between him and the fugitive. And the rider who could not escape and whose horse had sunk stood straight up, uncertain as to what to do, or ready to accept his fate. The pursuer unloosened his rifle calmly from the saddle, took careful aim and fired. The smoke rose from the gun as the bullet crashed, and then the man hung the rifle over his neck, took his horse by the bridle and went down to the river, where the outlaw had fallen face downwards.

Bertha Dam in the meantime left her carriage and went

down to the fallen man. She lifted his head and saw that it was Matthew. She was not surprised to find that it was he, nor was she crushed because he was dead. He was old and grey and almost unrecognisable, but she recognised him, and the same years that had ruined him had made her heart cold. He died just as he came home, such was his fate. And she had waited for him a thousand years, and now he had come, he had a lead bullet in his heart, now that she found him again. *Geerah!*

The man who had fired stood there and waited. She was a distinguished lady, she who sat holding the outlaw's head, he had better be polite to her. Lady Bertha turned her tearless face to the stranger and said softly, a tone of supplication in her voice:

"Let him rest a moment! His blood is still flowing."

She was afraid she would not be able to keep Matthew, she kept sitting and holding his head, while his blood ran out. She put his head in her lap and caressed it with her hands as she used to do when they were small and he cried about his boyish troubles. They always hid somewhere under the open sky, where no one could see them, when they were children. It did not seem so long since then. Now she had him again, and what did the time that had passed, in between, matter? How quietly he lay! He trembled just a little, ever so little, more and more feebly, just as when his tears used to cease, in the olden days, when they were small. *Geerah!*

The stranger talked to the coachman. He was an armed policeman from Hambourg who could speak only broken Danish. He had pursued the prisoner, who had escaped from jail, for four days. He had orders to get him dead or alive, and, as fortunately there were witnesses, he had thought it best to fire. Would the coachman please act as witness? Yes, indeed, that the coachman would do. The stranger took his hat off for Lady Bertha, whom he called *Madame*, and explained the matter to her. The man whom he had shot *ex tempore* in accordance with the state-law of Hambourg, was a highway robber and a murderer. Would *Madame* be witness to the fact that he was now dead?

Bertha Dam nodded gravely, absent-mindedly. Yes, she would.

Well, in that case the man had finished his job. The corpse did not concern him. It seemed as if *Madame* were interested in it; so much the better. . . .

The little morning incident ended by Lady Bertha driving back with the body in her carriage, while the stranger rode away the same way he had come, a signed death certificate in his pocket.

But when Bertha Dam at last had her dead cousin brought into the living room and laid out there, her rigid heart broke and she raved, distracted and weeping like a young girl, in the midst of her grotesque cats and pugs. And they looked at her, all her overfed, pampered old animals, they bleated, mewed, and barked at her, the dogs that lay there, the cats that couldn't get to their feet, and the sheep that was blind and half-witted.

A few years later the "Maiden" died and was buried. And then Southern Strandholm was divided into two estates.

There stands a stone in the Strandholm moor, a high, narrow block of granite, which in olden times was probably raised over a chieftain. It is like a huge hinge, on which a vast door could have swung. Around it the landscape is absolutely bleak. And the solitary, fantastic, gigantic hinge may be seen from miles around. It looks like the last remains of a colossal building, or part of an abandoned beginning to a colossal building. The atmosphere in this part of the country is so quiet, that it is like a cry of desolation when a sea swallow soars across the sky and flies high up. The sea swallow always flies alone. It is said to be the soul of a cursed maiden.

THE SMUGGLER

By AINO KALLAS

PARBU-JAAN, the smuggler, sat on a bench in the cell for prisoners awaiting trial, expecting each moment to be called before the judge. His square-clipped sailor's beard rested every now and then on the thick shawl wrapped twice around his throat; at each slightest movement his stiff oilskin coat crackled. Weary with waiting, he let his eyes wander over the wall of the cell, but soon desisted, finding that he knew the room as well as his own fisherman's hut on the shore of Kihelkonna; it was the third time that he sat within these walls. He glanced for a moment at his companions—two youths playing cards at the other end of the room. In reality they were pretending to be occupied by the game, the while they watched him with grinning faces, and open, boyish curiosity in their eyes. Parbu-Jaan weighed them up a moment with keen eyes, accustomed to look far over vast stretches of sea, and to which all objects seemed too close, a frown drawing his brows together as though he weighed the two lads and found them wanting in the balance.

Quickly, however, his face, expressive of cunning and determination, became wreathed in smiles and filled with good humour. He rose and paced across the room a couple of times, saying as he passed the youths:

"Stealing wood from the manor forest, hey?"

Tolerant forgiveness of the crime and contempt for its insignificance were mingled in his tone.

"Hit the nail right on the head," one of the youths said braggingly, and aping manliness.

Parbu-Jaan did not deign to look at them, but halted and stood tall beneath the barred window set high in the wall, his stalwart frame, over six feet, seeming to fill the room, and cast a giant shadow over all in it. His height enabled him to reach the window and to rest his

chin on the ledge of stone, and for a moment he stood there motionless; then, with a gesture of disappointment, he turned towards the room. His gaze had fallen on a little, typical Kuresaare yard, one of the many which opened out between the stuccoed, steep-roofed houses skirting the ruined fort like the song birds, full of life and chirruping, cluster round the nest of the eagle-owl. He had looked down upon it all, vegetable-patches, hens picking on a refuse heap, a cock standing on one leg, a horse champing its bit. It had not escaped his notice that one hen mothered three ducklings among her chickens; he had seen at a glance the black and yellow down on their bodies and their waddling walk. How they must long for the water, he had thought, rising on his toes as if to get a glimpse of something on the distant horizon beyond the roofs, where the air quivered in the heat as behind a dim veil of glass. A-thirst for what he could not see, yearning and disappointed, the pupils of his eyes expanded, his whole body called for salt after weeks of flavourless bread and water. The air was suffocating, and what little streamed through the crack in the window-frame seemed insipid, full of whirling atoms of dust. The sea remained invisible—far away behind the entrenchments and sand dunes.

He saw it in his mind—not the smooth sand for summer visitors at Kuresaare, but the wide, lonely sand-flats of the Kilhelkonna shore. So clearly did it arise before him that he seemed to smell the rotting seaweed cast ashore by the sea, and to feel the crunching of little rosy sea-shells beneath his boots. He saw himself wading in the water, which slowly deepened—in calm, translucent water, at the bottom of which he could see the seaweed covering the rocks wave slowly in the current, and a swarm of tiny fish darting away at his approach. The water rose slowly, penetrated the tops of his high boots, saturating his trousers, rising towards his waist. . . . And then he was on board his boat anchored at the edge of the shallows. Did he not hear where he stood the restless creak of the rigging, the ceaseless beat of the waves driven against the stern by a favouring wind? But the boat lay immovable, the anchor clutched the white sand with its curved flukes, the sails drooped

along the masts and the ships' sides were mirrored in the water. . . .

It must be gone—tomorrow—the day after—next week it must be in Memel. . . . His grim features become restless, his lips deep hidden in his beard no longer twitch with ready humour. His eyes glare like those of a beast of prey—behind his brow his wits are at work—he cudgels his brain striving to find a plan . . . he must be set free this time. . . . That is the haven towards which he must fight his way. He must be as sure, as certain of himself, as when he steered his smuggler's craft past hidden rocks and watchful coastguards.

The blind alley in which he is vainly groping becomes unbearable, he turns again to the lads whom chance has given him for companions, and in their curious eyes he reads the thought that fills his own mind; they are wondering will he escape imprisonment this time or no?

"Brushwood thieves," he grinned contemptuously at them, drawing himself up sharply to his full height, so that his broad shoulders seemed to support his body like a spar on which all else was hung.

"Boys ahoy!—what would you say was my size?" he said.

One of the youths, the one who had spoken earlier, smiled slyly, winking at the speaker.

"Too big to be held by these walls, anyhow."

"Right," he thundered in pleasure.

"We were playing 'durak' for thy luck," the youth went on, growing bolder.

"I need no luck but my own," he answered, with head thrown back.

"They say the judge is a new one—come lately from the Mainland," the other lad put in hurriedly, anxious for a say in the matter.

Parbu-Jaan looked at the last speaker's long face, at his forehead hidden by the thick hair, at the bony contours of his nose and jaw.

"Whose boy art thou?" he asked with an attempt of good humour. "A new judge," he added thoughtfully, already forgetting the boy.

"Tare Tiiu's."

"Tiiu's . . . Tiiu's," repeated Parbu-Jaan mechanically.

He began to walk excitedly to and fro. A new judge! What if he should be able to repeat his old trick. . . . But it was too well known . . . the walls of every tavern in Saaremaa had heard it, the very forests had echoed it. . . . He was surprised himself now at his own daring, admiration for himself grew within him as for a stranger. . . . Then also he had sat awaiting trial, his feet itching to be off, his vessel eager for departure. It was then that he shut his lips to a narrow line, took on an expression grave as of one in a church and asked to be allowed to speak to the judge: "Merciful Judge-Lord, the wife is welcoming a little stranger—ale ought to be brewed, and then the baptism—couldn't I go for a couple of weeks?" The judge hesitated—an old rascal, that Parbu-Jaan—but in the end consented. "See that you are back here in two weeks' time." He had raced to the Kihelkonna shore, hoisted sail, flown off to Memel for a load of rum and gunpowder. On the day agreed he had knocked at the prison door.

His thoughts returned to those old days, as if to gather strength from them. And in spite of his present plight laughter shook his frame, laughter that would free his spirit and restore his pride.

Memories tossed him up and down like a vessel tossed by the waves, tormenting and provoking him to laughter. This much he knew, that never would he be able to store too many such memories. He felt his craving for new adventures to string on to the old could never be slaked. He knew that never would he be himself again until he felt the deck planks sway again beneath his feet, with his hand upon the tiller.

An autumn evening, the land showing as a dark streak, looming up strange and unfriendly even for him, as he steers towards it. The moon unnaturally large, a rent torn in the sky, gleaming dimly instead of casting light. He can hardly trust his eyes, the spray clouds his sight as with a curtain of mist; as a rope creaks or taps against the mast he starts. He feels that the darkness that cloaks the shore is hiding something hostile, a danger of which his senses do

not grasp but only some occult instinct. Suddenly, signal lights flare up on the shore . . . the coastguards! With his comrades he begins to throw barrels overboard, grimly watching them as they roll into the water and sink—everything overboard. Next his eyes take in the shore, marking trees, rocks and sand-flats in the dim darkness, drawing the place, its distance from the shore more clearly in his memory than ever did surveyor on paper. The following day they lift the barrels from the bed of the sea with hooks.

Blood mingles in his memories, the sky glows an ominous red, he sees a hand clutch the gunwale of his boat, a large browned hand with knuckles and nails of iron—a hand whose owner is nothing to him—a hand rising from the depths to prevent his journey. His anger concentrates on the hand that dares to delay his boat, to him the hand is a living entity separated from all body. His hatchet swings through the air and the hand falls into the sea.

From this whirlpool his thoughts turn rapidly. Instead he sees a bright summer day, a smooth sea with flying gulls gleaming silver in the sunshine. He stands leaning against the mast of his boat, cunning, reserved, following with his eyes the Customs officials who search his vessel, running around like rats, nosing everywhere from hold to cabin, from cabin to deck. Without moving a finger he watches them, casting biting remarks at them between puffs at his pipe, advising them of secret hiding-places unknown to them. One after the other, they crawl on deck, discomfited as though suddenly drenched with water and he bids a polite good-bye to their chief, offering him a drink from his flask, bidding him welcome another time. But as the Customs boat grates on the sand, he seizes the coil of rope on which one of the searchers had sat, and between his hands rubs its end, which crumbles into brown leaves with a familiar smell—a twisted rope of tobacco.

Again he cast a yearning glance through the window. It is the middle of August, at night the sky gleams with stars, each one a compass. It is his pride to sail to Memel or the Swedish coast without a compass, trusting only to these tiny guides, which through the night vanish, light up and shift as the yawl sails on.

"Was't thou who said there is a new judge?" he asked suddenly, turning to the boys.

"It was I," one of the boys replied, proud of his knowledge.

Parbu-Jaan smiled, his hand stroking meanwhile his beard. In his fancy he heard the sound of words and much talk, his own voice rising and gaining confidence, some one laughing outright. . . . His hand clenched in a tight grip. . . . Now he has gotten the idea. . . . Just that. . . . As yet he is not quite certain, the scheme is almost too daredevil, but he must close his eyes to the danger. His state of mind is that of a diver in deep water; perhaps he may sink forever, more likely he will rise again to the surface.

He looked at the boys and began already to play his new part—his keen, knowing eyes dilated and became vacant and stupid, his shoulders drooped, his hair fell over his forehead, hiding its strong, intelligent lines, the firm decision of his mouth is lost in loose, gaping lips.

"Well, whom do I look like now?" he asked, turning to the two youths and pushing his cap to the back of his head.

They stared at him startled, something of wild savagery had suddenly come over him, something terrifying and inexplicable; they looked questioningly at each other, perplexed and open mouthed.

"Like Mad-Mats," whispered one into the other's ear.

"Right, boys. I am not quite right in my head, remember that. All night I have talked gibberish, I can no longer tell the moon from the sun. . . . If any one asks, say that."

The shifty eyes of the elder youth flashed and expanded, gleaming with understanding and admiration. The other stared, uncomprehending.

The elder youth bent suddenly towards Parbu-Jaan.

"What wilt thou give us?" he whispered.

Parbu-Jaan eyed him sternly, and broke into a laugh; he felt as proud of the boy as though he himself had trained him. The lad's early developed business sense appealed to his own instincts.

"A gun and powder, of the best make," he threw the words hastily at him as the warder's steps sounded in the

corridor. The boy threw himself with his whole weight against the door, and beat on it with his fists.

The startled eyes of the warder appeared in the spy-hole, eyes used to darkness which appeared perpetually to dread any disturbance of the everyday round.

"What has happened here?" he said in a chiding tone.

Parbu-Jaan stood in a corner, muttering to himself. The youths had drawn as far as possible away from him.

"We want to be put in another cell," cried the elder youth. "We can't stand him—he isn't right here, all night we got no peace listening to him talk, talk, talk as fast as his tongue would let him."

The warder looked suspiciously at Parbu-Jaan.

"What has happened to him here?" he grumbled. For his own part, he would have been ready to let them all go, guilty and innocent alike, but being set to guard them, what could he do?

"What has addled his wits now?" he repeated to himself.

"Let us go to the judge," he said quietly and coaxingly as to a naughty child, laying his hand gently on Parbu-Jaan's shoulder and pushing him out of the room.

Parbu-Jaan obeyed without resisting, not for a moment forgetting his part, his lips moving all the while in babble of meaningless words.

In the court-room the judge, a bespectacled gentleman, waited with his clerk.

"This man has gone mad during the night," the warder humbly explained, as though the misfortune was partly his fault.

The judge cast a cold eye on Parbu-Jaan, and despite its coldness, Parbu-Jaan felt himself go hot.

"That remains to be seen," the judge said dryly.

He read the charge in a loud voice, Parbu-Jaan listening with his eyes wandering uneasily round the room.

"Two empty coffee-sacks stamped with the Memel seal were found in the attic of Parbu's house," the judge finished his charge.

"Well, look now—don't lies get found out, gracious Judge-Lord," said Parbu-Jaan. "Sacks! As though coffee was ever carried in a sack—why, it would drip out."

"What nonsense art thou talking?" said the judge.

"No one carries coffee in a sack—coffee's a drink."

"Dost thou not know coffee, man?"

"How should I know gentlefolks' dainties?"

The judge looked at him for a while and then said:

"Come here—is not this thy compass?"

Parbu-Jaan reeled towards the table, purposely dragging his feet. With head on one side, he began to examine the compass.

"Well now, isn't that queer? It's moving—well, by . . . it's dancing like anything, what's the matter with it?"

"Man, remember with whom thou speakest. Who am I?"

"Thou art one of God's errand boys. When God draws up the laws on the tables of stone, thou bringest them down to us."

"Man, where wert thou last week?"

"I sat in the threshing-barn as God had created me, the wife washing my only shirt."

"Confessest thou or not?"

"Of course I confess whatever the Judge-Lord wishes. To everything I say only yea and amen."

"Thou wert then in Memel?"

"Certainly."

"When did that occur?"

"It is hardly twenty years ago."

"Have a care what you say, man."

"That is what I'm doing, and a care for my back too. I am not altogether mad, though not so clever as your Honour."

"Pah! I have no time for lunatics."

Parbu-Jaan's head drooped lower, and a smile vanished in his bushy beard. He dragged himself after the warder out of the court, the warder staring at him with respect mingled with fear. In the prison yard he paused—looked up at a window to where two youthful heads gazed curiously down at him, and waved his hand with a toss of his skipper's beard. His nostrils dilated as though the scent of the sea had struck them.

Six hours later he was bound for Memel, in the bright moonshine of an August night—with thousands of tiny, winking stars for a compass.

THE DEATH OF THE OLD DEEMSTER¹

By LAURI POHJANPAA

THAT day of July was warmer than any during the whole rainless, hot summer. Vanhakylä—a hamlet on the banks of a small lake—lay exposed to the burning and parching heat of the sun. It seemed as if the grey houses and cottages, surrounded by hurdle fences, had thronged together just in order to get shadow from each other against the merciless, burning rays. But vainly, for the long rainless period had, as it were, baked heat into the walls of the buildings, and now the heat was thrown back into the air. The sun was burning from a cloudless sky, the highroad was burning under the feet of the children, the walls and the stones were burning. The meadows had acquired a light brown colour, singed by the sun; the cattle still remaining in the village stood in the warm water of the lake along the reeds, exhausted by the heat. Even the church standing on the hill outside the village suffered; on its walls the air quivered, giving an impression of small burning wicks, and the old logs in the walls sweated resin.

The only place that did not seem to feel anything of the heat that tortured the whole village was the estate of the old deemster on the opposite side of the lake. But no wonder, for the estate was quite isolated and lay aristocratically alone surrounded by its garden. It was quite sheltered in the shade of the tall aspens and the aged maple trees. The leaves of the aspens moved slightly even in the dead calm, as fans lazily waving round some oriental prince. Only the "sauna," the Finnish steam-bath, peeped out from the shadow, its wall in the sun; it stood, as it were, on tiptoe, at the water's edge and it looked as if it were ready to retire into the shadow of the trees. The greyish main building with a curb-roof did not show itself at all, but

¹ Judge—this term is still used on the Isle of Man and in Finland.

rowing out to the midst of the lake you could perceive its green windows as evil eyes staring at the disturbers of the peace.

In the house of the old deemster it was always dull, dark and silent. The only voice heard in the house was that of the old deemster himself; you got the impression that all others in this abode merely whispered. But the old deemster spoke the louder. When he stood, still a stately and tall man, in the midst of the sunny mansion court, he spoke as a field-marshal would have addressed a whole army; when the air was calm his voice carried to every farm in Vanhakylä and everywhere the children ran away seeking a hiding place.

Deemster Ludvig Lindencrona was about eighty-five years old and stone blind, but he still lorded over the estate with unbroken strength of mind. He had been left alone, like an old pine in a young plantation, his sons and grandsons having died. Except himself, only the widow of his grandson, Agnes, and her daughter, Margaret, a girl of seven, lived on the estate. Although Agnes Lindencrona was almost thirty years old, the deemster treated her as a child to whom one could entrust nothing.

That day of July the old deemster was sitting in his easy chair as was his habit, straight and stiff. The easy chair was drawn up to the chest and in the chest were all the keys of the house. Although he had been ailing for a few days, the deemster wore a black frock coat, a white necktie and boots of patent leather. He had, with Napoleonic gesture, put his right hand inside the coat; at his outstretched left hand sat the shy and pale Margaret, the eye and servant of the deemster, on a small hassock. The white wig and the whiskers, the angles over the empty eyes and the strong, clean-shaven chin gave the face of the deemster an aristocratic expression. In old age he had preserved his majestic air. The heavy mahogany furniture reflected the master's solemnity, even the worn-out pieces of the furniture had something severe about them, and the tears in the sofa cover gaped hostilely. The room, as indeed the whole house, was dark and musty; the air was sultry because nobody was allowed to open the window.

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On one of the chairs in the doorway, was sitting the late Clerk of Assize, Nyholm. As a rule he was to be found sitting there; when not, the deemster would send a word round for him to come. This man had lately become indispensable to the deemster, who required someone to speak to, or rather to listen to his monologues. Nyholm was a trembling old fogey, in whose mouth only one tooth had been left as a memory of happier times, but his red-blue nose, striking witness to his bosom sin, was still a good interpreter of his unquenchable love of life, although his strength was gone. Nyholm was hardly smaller than his master, so the old suits of the deemster suited him well—although they turned as threadbare as he was himself. In the village the tails of the old frockcoat still fluttered neatly, so well suited were they to the clerk's tripping way of walking, but as soon as the late Clerk of Assize stood in front of the deemster, he became a miserable sinner—in front of the deemster all grew smaller.

Nyholm was sitting in his usual place prattling with his toothless mouth, piously twinkling with his eyes—answering the questions of the deemster.

"How do you find our fields, Nyholm?"

"Very good, your honour, very good, indeed, ye-es."

"You are lying, you old crow, as if I shouldn't know. Tell the truth straight out. Shamefully bad are they. The ditches are full of osiery, the fields of bad weeds."

"Oh, but no, your honour, no, no."

"Be silent and don't interrupt me. I know better than you. Here is everything going to the dogs because I am blind. All are stealing, the man-servant steals, the maids steal, perhaps you do, too. Is the rye flowering?"

"I dare say it is flowering, oh, yes."

"Again you are lying. Why do you come here with your tales? It has not flowered yet. But what should you know, when you are drinking all the time?"

"No, no, your honour. No, baron, the times are bad, I haven't got as much as that . . ."

"Who is there? Is it Agnes?" asked the deemster, feeling that somebody had slipped into the room.

"Please will you give me the key to the shed?"

"What are you going to do?"

"We want to bake."

"Are you mad, to bake by this weather? You want to set the house on fire as you can't destroy it any other way—eh? And what would you bake? Is it already my funeral feast you are all preparing for? I am not going to die yet."

"The people have no bread."

"Give them hay. We are not going to bake until it has rained, do you understand?"

The shadow has vanished. Nyholm laughs and giggles in silence in the doorway, pressing his hands between his knees.

"Oh, it is blazing hot; my mouth feels parched," says he, cautiously feeling the ground.

"Blazing hot, is it? I know—you want brandy, that's it, you old drunkard. But you shan't get a drop today, not a drop."

Nyholm kept his countenance; it was not the first time he was "driving for the parson."¹ He twinkles cunningly with his eyes: he knows the trick of it.

"Well, I must be going now, I just came to inquire about your honour's precious health. You seem to be very well today, baron, ye-es, I see it to my satisfaction."

"Oh, you find that," said the deemster, reviving. "I see, I see. But where are you going, old friend? Margaret, tell mother to have some corn-brandiy brought for Nyholm, and yes, why not? To me a glass of wine. And please, have a look on the highroad lest anybody should come."

Nyholm laughs again, bent forward, an old man's laugh, chuckling to himself, rubbing his hands against his chin. The deemster's aromatic corn-brandiy is the best of its kind. It is brought to him in a round, small, thick-bellied bottle.

"I have the honour most humbly to drink your Lordship's health." Nyholm was proposing his usual toast. In connection with corn-brandiy the deemster is always "your Lordship."

"Ah, how good and refreshing for my dry bones," says the late Clerk of Assize then, and speaking continually—

¹ A Finnish proverb.

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lest the deemster should observe it—he takes another dram.

"The deuce, how that hand of mine shakes."

On his cheeks appears a faint blush and the eyes grow more devotional. He will soon be in a state to listen to the soliloquy of the deemster; he coughs more intimately. But this time he will not hear the deemster's speech for at that moment Margaret opens the door and says:

"The vicar."

"Nobody else on the road?"

"Nobody."

Nyholm has still time to gulp down a couple of drams and to slip out as the vicar enters the room.

Mr. Tuominen, the vicar, a fat, mild-looking country parson, is dressed in clerical garb and holds in his hands a case containing the Holy Communion—lest it should be required. Even he is rather uncertain in his movements when speaking to the deemster.

"I am very glad to see you out of bed, my dear deemster."

"Out of bed! Ought I to lie in bed, or perhaps in a coffin? It looks as if some people are just waiting for that. Why did you come? Did I call for you, Parson?"

The deemster never liked to call Mr. Tuominen vicar. The only vicar for him was Dean Gustaf Adolf Grönberg, who about a year before had been moved to another parish.

"I heard that you were ill, deemster . . ."

" . . . and you have probably prepared my funeral sermon already, and got it in your pocket, eh? No, Parson, I am not yet going to die, nothing of the kind, and it is a great pity for your pathetic sermon. I am still waiting for a guest. I won't die before he has called, I have something very important to tell him. Margaret! Where is the girl again? Oh, there you are, Margaret! Are you quite sure you didn't see anybody coming? Oh, I see, yes—sit down, my child, and wait. And you, Mr. Parson, don't for goodness' sake move your feet like that! You are not going yet. Remain seated while you are here. It was nice of you to come, all the same. And now you could speak to me, miserable sinner that I am—words of comfort. But not too many words! Come, begin!"

And the vicar spoke in his mild manner. He was anxious, and hoped to be able by means of soft words to get below the icy crust and find the way to the heart of the old man. The deemster listened, head erect, the angles over the eyes drawn high up towards the forehead.

"Listen, Parson," said he after the vicar had finished, "listen, Parson, to what I have to say to you. With all your honeyed words you only make women weep—with all your syrup. Of course, it is all right, but you must make it harsher and stronger and not like food for little children. Have you ever heard that God is a consuming fire? Moses saw God in a burning shrub—that's a fine thing—you would never have been able to see that. You never hear God speaking in fire and in the tempest that breaks mountains; you apprehend him only in the souging of a faint wind. Do you know, Parson, who it was who once said: 'I have come to kindle a fire on earth,'—yes, a fire. But nowadays one never hears about fire in sermons. One sees only such soft and womanish milkmouths as, for instance, yourself—yes, and even my sons and grandsons died as flies. Erik didn't even leave a son behind him—oh, no, no, Margaret, you are not to blame, no, please run to the road and see if anybody is coming! Yes—what was I saying? Oh, yes, that God is fire. Fire purifies and makes hard. All that is best within us is akin to fire. Isn't that very strange? We have fire under our feet and above our heads, the fire of the earth and the fire of the sun. Earth is born of fire and shall perish in fire, just as we ourselves. . . . Yes, of fire are we born, and—don't try to interrupt me! Only he who worships the fire will be able to perform great deeds. As for instance, Napoleon. Napoleon was a worshiper of fire. He had a divine thought: first fire, then peace; the millennium will be born of the fire. Do you know why Napoleon perished? Because he fell away from the fire. Fire destroys him who is faithless to it. Napoleon almost succeeded, but . . . even he was after all a milksop. I know it. I am, I was"—here the voice of the old deemster turns to a whisper—"I was, as you certainly have heard, summoned to a great task" (the old deemster had told it many times before), "to be a general and a statesman, I

won't specify in what high position. Well, it didn't come off, and it doesn't matter now anyhow. But—I hope I can trust in your discretion—I nevertheless influenced the current of the world politics, secretly, you know, by way of thought and mind. Oh, if you knew, Parson, what I do! Even this emperor, who calls himself Nicolaus II by the grace of God—it is blasphemy, I say. In that man there is no fire. I have the courage to say it, and nobody shall send me to Siberia, for angels in thousands keep guard around me—this emperor wouldn't reign one day more, if I did not allow it. But I am still waiting or, rather, I have been waiting. For the sake of Finland, I love this stupid people. Today a guest will call on me, or perhaps tomorrow, and great things will happen, but—that doesn't matter either. Only this much will I say, that if that perjurer who calls himself Nicolaus II doesn't do what I want in reference to Finland, he and his empire will perish in fire. Oh, it will be a splendid conflagration, you will see! Again today I spoke to the archangel Gabriel and to Napoleon . . . Napoleon is, on account of his merits, commander-in-chief of the heavenly hosts. But when I shall come to that place where he is now, the archangel Gabriel will say to him: 'Step down from your white horse' (and Napoleon will step down)—'Instead of you Ludvig Lindencrona will take the place that was intended for him from the beginning of the world'."

The old deemster had risen and spoke the last words with a voice quivering with emotion and was nearly crying without noticing it himself. He was beautiful to look at standing upright, one arm high in the air and the blind eyes turned upwards—an old disciple of Swedenborg, who in the years of his blindness, had become a worshiper of Fire.

Meanwhile the vicar had risen, too, and showed signs of going.

"Look . . . look quickly," whispered the deemster suddenly and stared with a curious air . . . "there, behind the maple tree . . ."

"What, what is it?"

"Now it stops and looks toward us, oh, good God, how it looks . . . now it is going on again . . ."

"I don't see anything."

"And what could *you* see? Now it has already vanished! I see, though blind, better than you, who have sight. It was absolutely distinct, the uniform of the marshal . . . the three-cornered hat. And he looked at me. It was Napoleon. Napoleon passed there and greeted me. I know very well what it means."

The deemster retired once more into his shell and let Margaret follow the vicar out. It was the usual hour for his daily round through the place. He went to survey the field of rye, touched with his hands the sheaves of rye, caressing them and inhaling their odour, walked through the meadow to the cattle-shed, where the cow had calved, and to the stable, where the black state horse got bread. The people were today on the meadows far from the house.

After his walk round the house the deemster stopped in the middle of the court. The sun was burning. A motionless, ill-omened silence weighed heavily.

"Margaret," said the deemster suddenly, "can you see smoke anywhere?"

But before Margaret had time to answer, an outcry was heard from afar:

"The church is on fire!"

"The church is on fire!" was echoed also from the village. On the road women and children appeared suddenly, staring in the direction of the church, afraid and perplexed as men are when faced by some terrible, inconceivable stroke of destiny. The wall of the church nearest the wood was the first to kindle, but the flames already sparkled high over the roof. At the same time a flame flickered round the corner of the church, hesitated for a moment, and hurled itself swiftly in mad rush against the wall next the village, spread with inconceivable speed all over it, reached the ridge, ran like a squirrel to the edge of the steep shingle roof, rose high in the air, and came back to devour the laths. From the court of the deemster's house one could hear the crash of the window glasses. The incipient draught excited the fire to a more violent rage.

A man ran onto the road with a bucket in his hand, another followed. A few minutes later the doors of the

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where are you? Let me lean on you, I am strangely tired.”

The old deemster went with heavy steps into his room, on the walls of which the light of the fire flickered, went to the desk, opened it and took out of it a heavy, sealed letter.

At that moment the vicar, Gustaf Adolf Grönberg, drove into the court in his carriage, jumped down and rushed in.

“You came just in time,” said the deemster slowly. “Here is the letter to the emperor, who calls himself Nicolaus II. Give it to the archbishop and let the archbishop give it to him. On this letter depends the fate of Finland and of all Russia.”

The old deemster tottered backwards and fell into the arms of Agnes Lindecrona and the vicar. They carried him onto his bed. The deemster sighed twice, almost imperceptibly, and died.

Behind the windows, on the other side of the lake, the village of Vanhakylä burned itself steadily out.

THE HOLIDAY CHILD

By JOSEPH WINCKLER

LITTLE FRANZ MEINIKAT, aged twelve, was to be one of the party of Holiday Children from Bochum whom good Samaritans among the farmers of the Rhineland were to house and entertain gratis. His father was a wood-cutter in the pits, an ordinary sort of man; his weakly mother had died after a painful illness during the war and Franz was the youngest of the three she had left.

The schoolmaster and a Sister accompanied the party. The half-light of dawn hovered over the town. The big station was loud with the noise and shouts of children who, with the irrepressible abandon of young colts, stormed the train and swarmed the carriages. A whistle—the axles groaned, and the train moved off on a very tide of noise.

Among the kiddies were some who were still enough: anxious little souls, with ill-defined regrets of home and fears of the unknown; but the wonderful harmony of earth and sky, on the horizon of which the ugly, seething city had melted away as in a silvery mist, soon brought surprise and gladness into their young hearts, and they, too, were possessed by the communal joyousness of their fellows. Only an odd one or two felt a tear trembling in the corner of their eyes; be it the play of memory, or that transient emotion which grown-up people are prone to love in a child.

They swung through great industrial regions and waking cities, over a broad stream, glittering and scintillating in the sun, greeted with shouts and clapping of hands. They thundered past cathedrals and then shunted onto a side track. Little eyelids became heavy with sleepiness; travelers got few and far between. Suddenly, the schoolmaster read out four names out of a sheet of paper: "These will get out at the next station."

Franz was not among these, somehow he breathed more

Then, unexpectedly, a tunnel swallowed up train and cart and countryside; a long drawn "Oh . . ." struck fear into the little hearts. The windows were all pulled up, and Franz waxed torpid in the darkness. He only woke up to full consciousness when the train stopped again and he heard his own name called.

There were three ministers now on the platform. And outside the gate were five conveyances, even better decorated than the former ones. A Sister with the face of a full moon and enormously wide skirts received them: "Come along with me, all of you, this way!" She led the way, walking heavily, with a kind of motherly air, and hoisted the youngest children into the carts. Then one of the ministers stood forward and spoke in a deep voice: "In the name of this community I welcome you all. You are to find in our midst rest and recuperation from your smoky industrial cities and the bad, hungry times of the war. But never forget that you owe this to loving charity and see that you are obedient and good children. I will visit you all in your several farms and then you can tell me if there is anything wrong. God bless you, children!"

To which the bravest replied: "Thank you, Sir."

It was a biggish place where Franz was quartered, belonging to a well-to-do farmer. What a high wall that was, that enclosed it!

A young servant girl led Franz to a seat next the door of the living house, and there he sat down with his bundle, and opened his eyes wide. A great number of shining milk cans were just being carried by. People seemed to have forgotten all about him, and no one took any notice. After about an hour the farmer's wife appeared and started: "Are you Franz Meinikat?" and then took stock of him. "I've got a laddie myself you can play with. He's down the village just now. So your dad's working at the mines? Well, you'd much better become a farmer and stop here for good, hadn't you? But first you must spend the summer here and go to school. If you need anything, just tell me."

So a new world opened out before Franz. First of all he ascertained that the dog in the yard was called Sörmann. Then he visited the threshing room and the bakery and

groped his way along mangers. Cries of animals seemed to ooze out of every wall, windows and roofs were alive with the twittering of birds; there was a rustling in the hay, all manners of curious tackle and machinery, intoxicating smells, water lurking in the dark trough and trickling through a tiny hole. He watched the farmer with his greenish forbidding face, carrying a bundle at the end of a big pole. From one of the branches of a plum tree there hung a thing like a living bunch of grapes, seething and shimmying and humming with the hum of a thousand bees. The farmer plucked it with his bag-shaped bundle and said: "The queen's among them . . ."

Franz finished his tour by climbing up carefully into the loft. He observed the fowls in their house above the stable, how they stood in wonderful positions, some with extended necks gazing at the roof as if in a trance, others with head tucked into downy breasts, and, behind them all, a great cock, nodding in his sleep in quaintly comical fashion, like a king with a red crown and purple neck-ruffle. And he took to wondering how it was that they did not fall from their perches. The farmer's wife said: "Yes, my boy, they must have thick perches, for otherwise, when they are too thin, the roosting birds press too hard with their heads on their breast and then they ail." Franz reflected with a shade of incredulity how it could be that hens could squash in their sleep such fine, even-feathered breasts. . . .

For supper there was thick, cool, sour milk in big blue dishes. There were many grown-up people eating in the room, and they threw weird shadows on the white-washed walls. The farmer knocked on his plate with his spoon and started praying aloud. Franz had never heard a family worship: it sounded like in a church. Then one of the farm hands related something, and his speech was like a foreign tongue. Franz just understood something about a cow heavy with calves—then the farmer's wife pointed to him before all the folk and said: "Remember there is a strange child from the city among us." And he blushed deeply. To create a diversion an old fellow remarked: "The dogs smell bad; it means rain!" Franz tried vainly to imagine what connection there could be between dogs and clouds. Also

he strained his ears to catch more novelties but there was no further incident of exciting interest.

Soon afterwards he let himself sink into an enormous bed. The whole night through animals chased each other through his brain. He awoke panting, there was a thunderstorm on, such as he had never experienced in the town. It was thundering and beating through the swishing trees, so near that you could feel its very breath. It hit the open window and shook and rattled it. For whole seconds at a time the bed and the chest of drawers would be lit up, like islands floating on a sea of darkness.

But he noted his clothes lying on a chair beside the bed, and his shoes still on the very spot where he had put them at night, and that gave him some comfort for a few moments—till the next clap of thunder, when he would once more helplessly break out in tears. The big house was now very cool, and he listened; but no man got out of bed, all seemed to be still and asleep. Suddenly there rang out the harsh, wild crow of a cock. Franz thought perhaps the cock had mistaken the lightning for daylight: the thought made him smile and, ere he knew, he had fallen asleep again.

In the morning there was fine, appetising white bread and milk. The farmer's boy, whose name was Bernard, said to Wee Franz (for so they all called him, he being so puny): "Ja—you are not as rich as we are . . ." Franz wanted to retort: "But we live in the city!" but Bernard was proceeding: "We have a thousand hens." Franz tried to get a mental picture of a thousand hens and snapped pertly: "You're a silly country boor." Bernard started howling. Without trying to ascertain the origin of the trouble, the farmer's wife slapped her offspring's ear and said to Franz: "Come here!" He saw how she was sewing up a ham in sacking; she explained: "I am sending it to my sister in the town. I expect you can write fine. Here—write the name on the label." So Franz wrote the name of the strange woman neatly and the address; finally he was sent with the ham to the post office.

Bernard had to attend school, so Franz remained alone a few days longer. He was told he must sleep off the effects of the journey; but there was too much to see and do.

A farm hand, all bent up and with a wooden leg, took him aside and whispered: "Take only black coffee and dry bread and you will live to be a hundred. Good eating and drinking is a bad thing for man." But Franz replied: "How many animals will there be here on the farm?" The bent-up one spread out his fingers and muttered: "A million—there or thereabouts."

The old fellow of the farmyard, who had fallen off a tree when picking pears and stuck his ribs through his lungs, took Wee Franz with him to gather herbs which, dried in the sun, yielded a tea that was supposed to be a perfect cure for sick lungs. They also searched for one rare little herb that gives a fine taste to "schnaps."

When you lie thus stretched out on the soil, looking for herbs, you realise how fabulously big are the animals. A colt is seen as a terrible monster with silent, wide-apart legs, and geese crane their necks as high as camels. A house has doors fit for giants to pass through, and as for the roof it loses itself in the heavens. Even the blades of grass, when you look at them for some time, become unrecognisable; they stand there like swaying trees with proud crowns of foliage and with branches on which trembles soft, downy dust; when a beetle crawls up one of them, you are afraid he is going to fall down an abyss. And the play of countless darts of sunlight under the green roof of a tree, how deliciously beautiful it is when you look at it from far below—how the wind-weighted, fork branches are criss-crossed in a network of mysterious luminous green, how they whisper and rustle softly, endlessly. But when you look properly—especially if you tighten your eyes till they are quite small—you will see that these scintillating sundarts are all tiny, fluttering flies, whose transparent bodies become lit up like lamps every time they dance out of the shade into a gleam of light.

The pale, anæmic child of the city, with the angular knees, was acquiring eyes that dream. Through all his pores, there oozed out a bliss the like of which he had never known.

It seemed as if everyone here just did what he pleased. Every man worked just for himself. Different from his

father, who must walk a long way to his work and be there to the minute for his shift. And no one here had black rings under the eyes! True, the dairymaid showed him her fingers, thick and bent and full of scratches, fingers that milked three times a day—the big beautiful bossy alone yielded twenty liters—and told him that at harvest or ploughing time there was much heavy work to do. But Wee Franz just said: "I would like to knock down all the nuts from your tallest tree." Nothing seemed to him more heavenly than herding the cows. Silence, save the sucking of hoofs in the spongy grass, the shaking of the cattle's heads, the twittering of birds on the edge of the neighbouring wood. The blackberry bushes showed as yet nothing but hard nodules and whitish faded blooms, but the wild raspberries were ripening sweetly. Once, however, he fell asleep and the string of cows idled back into the stable. Then they all laughed at him. So now he kept to the pigs, for in summer they, too, go a-grazing in the meadows. He wondered how that great fat sow, of bacon all compact, could exist on grass alone—of such tiny blades too. How could such a thing be? If it was, then what is said in the reading book might be true, too, that elves and fairies live just on the morning dew. He resolved to explore this question further. He lived in expectation of something wonderful.

Behind the grange, a horse trough was being constructed. Vatter Riemers, the stone mason, worked at it himself and wore blue protection glasses as if he were breaking stones. Wee Franz loved being alone with him, and Vatter Riemers was not long in noticing it: "Any fool can do masonry," he said, "but stonework is a fine art, and he who does not feel that, does a bad day's work. You see that quarry there behind? One must tear the blocks loose with steel—explosive stuff breaks up this kind of stone too much. But you cannot split block long like a chancel so long as it is in the natural state, fresh and green from the living heart of the hill. You must wait a few days till it has paled and bleached. Then you drill three holes in it, the depth of a man's finger, and take this tool here and set to work on it with twenty-pound hammers. The stone actually speaks

—you can hear it distinctly, you must then wait awhile and beat at it again, till it creaks and splits and cracks inside. You dig the tool deeper in and need do no more: the great block falls of its own accord and dies. But never work at frozen stone—and remember the thickest stone will freeze through in a day like oil—you can see it melting, a few inches of moisture round the edges, as if the skin of it were perspiring. The best stone is from the Varberg yonder; the deeper the better, for its moisture has not been sapped by the sun. With real good sandstone you can put up a wall that will hem in eternity. The Devil himself could not pull it down. Yes, yes, my boy—stone is not such a simple thing as folk think. If you want to learn its secret you must start young.”

Franz thought and thought: stones too are living things? He caressed a block and knocked on it with his knuckles.

In a short time he had become a universal favourite. The farmer's wife loved him, with perhaps a tinge in her love of self-satisfaction at a good deed being done. The serving men were glad by instinct to see one of their own class thus honoured. The old fellow of the yard made him two stilts. Roses were in bloom in the garden and all manner of flowers in the meadows. The first fruits of the earth were being garnered. Between the rows of serried twigs, women and girls with many-coloured kerchiefs round their heads worked whole days plucking peas. Round the vine the kittens frolicked and sunned themselves. The Hukuk had long been stilled. It was the heyday of the year.

The old fellow, a kind of ancient uncle, had a big arm-chair in the garden, near the beehive, where he would take his afternoon nap, for he said he could slumber only to the humming of the bees. “Bees are cleverer than men,” he said, “and in flights of many hours discover the cutest hidden flowers and come straight back home. The neighbour cannot prevent them flying over his meadows and orchards, his beets and his carrots—he must just put up with it even if they collect a whole dishful of honey from his land and pay nothing for it. The beekeeper is a well favoured man; if he kept cows he would be prosecuted if one of his calves as much as strayed an ell over his neigh-

bour's field. One farmer hereabouts smeared poison about for the bees: but he was severely punished for it. I saw him hitting at the bees with a spade, and I just laughed at him. Even if the bees sting him, he is bound to let them be. The State Courts can make him. His best plan would be to keep bees of his own, but he is too stupid for that. And he just rages when he sees us selling eighteen big loads of honey." The old man chuckled. "He had plums as red as a cardinal's hat, but my bees ate them all up and he just had to grin and bear it. He could put fine nets over them but—I tell we'll get eight loads of honey this year off his plums alone."

Wee Franz gazed at the neighbour's orchard and felt pleased, just as the old fellow.

"Yes," he said, "we get plenty honey and be quite content." And this too gave him a sense of home. The very bees, every one of them, were bearing sweet honey for him from all the land for hours' flight around and the neighbours could do nothing to him for it.

Bernard had found a nest by the river and brought home two fledglings. He showed them to Wee Franz, who examined them excitedly: their reddish-yellow beaks and long, thin legs cased in black feathers. Bernard lifted one by the half-formed rump of its wing and the poor, tender thing squeaked with the pain; then he threw it contemptuously against the wall: "Bah! They'd come to nothing anyhow!" Wee Franz in great indignation threw himself upon him and with angry, flaming cheeks rescued and bore off the second fledgling. He was wandering about with it in a dazed fashion when a farm hand got hold of a brooding hen and set her on it. He explained to Franz: "It's not a wild duckling, but a water chicken. You can see that by the feet that are not palmed." "I'll take him back home with me!" exclaimed Franz, aglow with devotion. "Most likely the hen will kill it," said the man with cold indifference.

One day when the farmer's wife found him again gazing at the henhouse, she explained many things to him: "The laying hens have redder crests and—can you hear them singing out? They cackle before laying the egg, and again after, but louder and quicker then, with a clear note, as

if trying to crow." And Wee Franz spent the whole morning listening to the many-throated cackling of this fowl-folk, that seemed to him no longer a confused, meaningless thing; and he spun himself a rich, enchanting tale out of it.

Franz was becoming unsociable; not quite unsociable perhaps, but very timid, ever wrapped in thought, sometimes till he felt a trifle dizzy.

Behind the farmhouse there was a hillock, and from its topmost round knoll you could see so far that it was almost uncanny. There he sat him down one day and wept, unconsciously, feeling himself very much alone in the world. It was on a Saturday evening and the village bells yonder were ushering in the Sunday. In the city he had always heard church bells, but they had just made a noise, as everything makes in the towns. It was all different here: they had a clear, free ring—first from a high-toned bell, then from a deeper till they melted into one, and got apart again, waxing mightily louder and louder and filling space with their sweet, joint harmony till the woods resounded and the fields burst into music and the heavens became a mighty echo. In the midst of it the voice of the farmer's wife: "Wee Franz, where are you?" For he had been granted permission to help weed the garden, that it might look tidy for the Sunday. And he worked conscientiously at it in the warm, sandy soil, hearing the bells all the while and thinking it was as if God were coming down on a visit.

The lame labourer was cutting a hedge, and Franz stood by watching for a moment and enquired: "How long has the farmer had this farm?" "Since Adam and Eve, I expect," grinned the lame man. Franz trod this consecrated soil with a new, surprised respect.

Then he had to sit on the threshold and, together with Bernard, polish the boots till they were shining and put them before the several bedroom doors; for the next day's church service. The maids had pulled on great aprons of blue coarse cloth and stood in their broad wooden shoes pouring out streaming water buckets over the stone floors. Then white sand was strewn over the floor of the living room. The horses came in earlier than usual and were brushed and combed and groomed and had their hoofs

blackened by the stable hand. Franz was watching him, when he felt himself suddenly lifted high up on to the horse's back. He held on fearfully, his fingers dug into the mane, but when Bernard came running up and started laughing at him, he held his breath and would have bitten his tongue off rather than have cried out. With a sort of terror he felt that he was still a stranger here.

He hid himself behind the mowing machine. The sun beat down between the sharp, glittering blades and seemed to give a keener edge to his feeling of cruel fear. Of a sudden he realised, trembling, helpless, misunderstood as he was, that behind the life beautiful and the plenteousness thereof, there lurks an undefinable uncanniness. The bells were stilled in his heart.

The farmer came back from shooting, in a green suit and high boots, carrying a deer. He had cut it open in the forest after the kill and torn out its entrails. Franz felt the soft skin and, timidly, in a half tone, begged for the two little horns. But the farmer, who was just taking off his coat, just muttered gruffly: "You people are always trying to skin something off me!" Wee Franz grew bitter at the thought that this man, who, since the days of Adam and Eve had owned a million animals, would not even give him the two little horns. It was not even as if they were good to eat.

Horrible shrieks from the yard made him stagger away to see what was up: he arrived just as two hens were getting their heads sliced off.

That evening he wept copiously, endlessly. Yet nothing had really happened. Like a streak of lightning there flashed through his memory a thing his father had once said, spiced with swear words: "The rich swine guzzle their fill while we waste to death with hunger." The farmer must be just one of these swine. Rich he was, boundlessly rich, he must be, otherwise his wife too would go out charring. After all, the lame, bent-up man with the wooden leg was not so mad as people pretended when he said: "Good eating and drinking is a bad thing for man!"

All at once he was filled with rancour. And he thought more of his mother, whom he had wellnigh forgotten.

On the Sunday the roast choked him. The farmer's wife smiled: "You'll get bread and milk later on." He thought of the taste of bread and milk and could hear his mother just behind him sobbing out: "Ah, if we could only get a little milk!" He was full of hatred.

Was it yearning for home that was rising within him? Because the world here was so big, so splendid? Was it his childish nature being shaken in its idleness by the wonders of ripening and working and blooming things, of the deep, mysterious blues of evening shades, of the deep, living force that rang out of all creation? Or the dawning bitterness of his worker's class consciousness? That out of oblivion he had dropped here among active things? Some day he, too, would go down the pit and in abysmal depths hack coal off by the flicker of a miner's lamp—perhaps in the bowels of the earth under this very farm—he beat his little fists against his temples—he was like an ox, Bernard like a bird! And the old uncle, the stable hand, the cows would be going their way far above him and would bellow angrily if he entered the garden with his black, coal and sweated face—his mother would be long dead then. . . .

On the Monday everybody had gone off to gather the hay. Some one knocked and there entered two women to buy something. The farmer's wife tucked away the money in a big leather purse that closed with a string, and locked it up in the cupboard. The purse must be full of money. It was quite fat. Yes, he must be with profiteers. The schoolmaster said all profiteers should hang. But the farmer's wife had a kind face, and she had actually given him a striped shirt of Bernard's. That surely was funny! A riddle. . . .

When Bernard grew up, would he have to pay as much as that for an egg? Franz determined to ask him about it soon.

The farmer and his wife were quarreling in the room, he banging on the window. There were words like: "You give away everything much too cheap—" "Miser!"—"Wretched crowd of hobos! You'll get no thanks from them." They hit the boy's consciousness. His own father and mother had quarreled in just the same way; how was it

that this couple had so much more out of life? Was it that God was unjust? These should be better folk surely, for had they not everything abundantly? Yet it now seemed his father and mother were the better pair. "All men are equal," he remembered hearing his father say. No—all men are not equal. One has more than the other. Was the farmer blind? Did he not see how big his butterflies were—particularly those with the violet wings? And how lovely the forget-me-nots bloomed by the brookside? Or the countless cups of gold in the grass? Why, the sun that shone over his fields was his! And all the stars had to filter down dew on his leaves! His was that round bit of sky that lay over his land, just the same size—yet it must be very, very far away; so after his death he could just choose a star for himself to enter heaven by. Poor folk must have a very small corner in heaven. . . .

But as he saw the farmer and his wife step out arm in arm and wander off along the stone-flagged path, and as he heard the woman say: "There will be a fine harvest this year, God showers his blessings upon us . . ." then something in Wee Franz seemed to swell out and a devilish thought flashed through his mind. He put out his tongue to them behind their backs and said grimly: "No—I know better. What you own is not that little bit of sky above you, but the Hell that is beneath you! The furnace that will burn you up is just the same size as your damned farm!" Something elfin, uncanny, seemed to have seized hold of him.

He watched the sunset through the leaves of the apple-trees and rejoiced in the lurid glare that played about the tops and the trunks of the trees.

He stood a long time before the henhouse. He watched the hens how they roosted in their curious positions, one with the craned neck, one with head nestled in feathers and the great cock once more nodding in sleep like a king with a red crown. And he thought: "I should like to give you all perches as thin as needles so when you sleep you beasts crush in your breasts!" He would not grant the farmer the possession of his hens.

The whole of the next day was spent in filling great

earthen pots with jam and preserves: beans and green peas, black currants, raspberries, elderberries, squashed, pressed through fine linen cloths till the succulent juice ran out. From top to bottom the house reeked with the smell of the crushed fruit. What could well be the money value of these things? Delicacies for invalids, he had been taught at home—but there were no invalids in this house. Luxuries for healthy people!

The very furniture mocked him bitterly. These rooms were all too big! There were far too many pictures on the walls! And all these brass plates and canisters over the chimneypiece—did not his mother have the very doorknob of brass taken from her during the war for the ammunition people? Yes—this must be the sinful luxury which the minister had denounced in his sermons. He resolved to herd the pigs no more—to do no work at all. Pity he could not manage to poison the bees. . . .

The everlasting cursing of the farm hands sounded revolting to him—all day long, rising without a moment's grace from the fields, where they plied the whip on the patient oxen at the plough, and filled earth and sky with their maledictions. The big horses steamed and snorted and stamped, harnessed in clinking chains to lumbering wagons as if in torture chambers. The whole stableful of cows groaned and strained at the ropes. The very dog growled and whined, leashed to his kennel. And the pigs—none destined to live his days, but to be slaughtered and skinned. The bees could steal as they pleased, to be plundered in their turn. The hens had their eggs robbed from them, the cows their milk, the sheep their fleece; the little birds had their nests ravished by the farmer's boy. This farm was a cruel robber's den; the farmer a murderer, a torturer of animals; the wife with her sanctimonious airs spared on the vegetables for the market; the uncle was bursting with envy, it was a place of vice he was in, that fattened on the high cost of living it caused in the cities, and fattened on the slaving toil of his father.

Some deep, secret instinct was driving him, carelessly, remorselessly. Under his bed he made a cache and there in an old basket collected unripe fruit and nuts, without

thought of the why and wherefore of the collecting, nor how he would dispose of it. It was just a craving to amass and it gave him a certain sense of satisfaction, the miser's joy in his first personal possession.

The great Slaughter Feast came along just as the child had unconsciously worked himself into this state of mind. The doomed sow was, as custom would have it, let loose in the yard so she could tumble and grub out to her heart's content for the last time. About eleven o'clock the butcher came, a long skimpy fellow, who carried a long knife and a sharpening stone in a leather scabbard at his side. He shouted to Franz: "Hey you! Make her run, chase her—she must gallop—that way her blood runs better!" But Wee Franz walked away somberly.

He heard a sudden angry grunt and saw how the butcher and one of the hands tied a rope to the sow's hind leg and fastened it to an iron ring affixed to the door of the grange. The man threw himself heavily against the animal, that started shrieking in instinctive fear of death and tried to defend itself with foaming mouth and raving eyes. But the butcher seized it skilfully and overthrew the big beast on its back. Wee Franz saw how its four legs were tied together and how the butcher knelt on it and drew out his long, razor-sharp knife and—the boy felt sick with horror—pushed it slowly into the neck, that it glided silently into the flesh, ever deeper and deeper, while the sow cried and whined in high, heartmelting notes as one possessed. But the butcher set his lips and dug the knife further, while the farm hand laughed. That is, one could only see by his face he was laughing, for the mad shrieking and gurgling of the demented, tortured beast was filling house, yard and fields with an inferno of noise. A maid had run up with a pan and held it in front of the cut. When the knife was withdrawn the blood squirted out steaming and hissing into the pan. When it was full to the rim with blood the butcher took a turnip and screwed it tight into the wound till the maid had emptied the pan and brought it back, then the blood was allowed to run out again. The gurgling only came in dying ebbs now and at last after its long torture, the animal gave a last convulsive kick.

Maids stood by ready with buckets of hot water and poured it on to the skin till great white clouds of steam rose. Then the skin was removed with a scalpel-like instrument; the eyes were dug out of the head and the body carried on to a table. The sow must be dead by now, thought Franz, who was standing bathed in sweat and as white as a corpse. The carcass was cleaned and scraped with knives and cold water, then set up and stretched on a tall ladder. Wooden staves were driven through the muscles of the hind-legs and from them the carcass hung droopingly. The butcher whetted a couple of big knives, and standing with feet outspread, cut off the fore legs and placed a bucket below the head to receive the blood that was still trickling down the nostrils; then he made a long upward cut in the belly and opened it as one does a double window—the entrails glided out, warm and evil smelling, the man squeezing out the filth with his clenched fist. The farmer's wife now appeared in the doorway with a white apron and gave him a stiff glass of "schnaps" on a plate.

While the sow was being thus cut up, great preparations were forwarded in the house. Meal and fat, salt and muscadine prepared for doughnuts; the soft entrails made into sausages; the ears, nose and feet boiled to make that jellied substance known as a "sülz"; the hams hung up for smoking. The whole place smelled and stank. The cats paced and jumped about with awful eyes, snapping a piece here and there; the dog in the yard, become a grunting, obscene beast, gulped down his bloody maws the lungs and other offal the butcher had thrown him. A fat black rat ran past Franz like a streak of lightning and the fowls fluttered about uneasily, still under the ban of the death roars. Blood lay in patches everywhere; and in all corners were malice, greed, gluttony and terror.

At this propitious time, on that same day, came the minister. He took Wee Franz up on his knees and lifted his chin: "Ah, my boy, you do look fine! Such cheeks as God gives only to healthy folk!" Franz blushed deeply. He felt sardonically that this was a singularly stupid minister. The farmer's wife sat for a time with the clergyman in the living room and said in her soft voice: "Yes—a good

child—very quiet—very poor—I would like to take him up—one might educate him for the Church.”

Franz shuddered. In anguish he rolled himself in the grass of the meadow. “Why is the treacherous world so full of cruelty here?” he thought. “Could I but set you free, you big, poor, wonderful horses! Deliver you from the malice and teasing of the stable hands and from that sinister butcher! Save you from this bleeding!” The blood rose within him. With it; thoughts. Had not the neighbour poisoned the bees? And the uncle, rats and mice? Is it then not allowed to poison other, better, finer animals? But—no one must notice it, no trace must be found—it could be done up there in the henhouse, down there in the piggery—but the cows? They only eat grass—and the mighty bulls?

His teeth rattled as he thought of the little yellow cupboard marked “Family drugs”—he staggered into the house. He chose two small packets out of the cupboard.

He crept up to bed early. With swift-beating heart he awaited midnight. Then rose and edged to the door. The huge kitchen lay in deepest darkness but he knew the way. Everything was silent; only the grandfather clock ticked. Suddenly the child stopped with a shudder: the moon appeared round the corner of the house, round and full, and flooded the yard with light almost as clear as day. A horse stamped dully. Wee Franz glided like a ferret to the stable. He lifted the latch and listened: in the inky blackness within he could hear the groaning of the huge bodies of resting cattle. If he were to slide or fall they would stand up and rush at him and beat him with horns and hoofs.

Hesitation spread over his whole body—he prayed to his patron saint, shook himself together and slowly climbed the ladder that led to the henhouse above. Reddish-brown fowls barely glinting in purple blackness. Everywhere low rustling and peckling. As if rats in thousands were racing in the roof above him. There the big old cock must be—he had watched it the evening before—and here the fat hen that craned her neck. If he were to touch her she would stumble off, for the farmer’s wife had said hens could not

see in the dark and would lie where they fell—then the others would stir and the cock would crow and all would be lost. But nothing happened when his fingers encountered something smooth. He felt a tiny heart beating in it, and it was warm . . . his fingers glided over the whole body . . . his mouth opened wide and his eyes swelled out into the night. Silently he let the violet grains trickle through his fingers—and softly edged away. Now quickly to the piggery—that is it—the fat sow, the next for slaughter surely. And he put a handful of phosphorus cake in her trough; in the others a smaller amount.

He fancied suddenly the minister came flying into the yard with a big black coat, and the farmer's wife too, out of the room, with outspread arms: "Help, help! my cattle!" For Wee Franz knew not his own shadow, and fled. He had to pass under the old uncle's windows, and groped his way with clammy fingers.

The vegetable garden lay in unreal white glare. A scythe hung threateningly over him from an appletree and glittered in the air. He stumbled against the trough. But the dog in the yard gave no voice. He started running, straight in front of him, with bare feet. He chased ahead, without aim, without idea of getting anywhere. From his hair cold moisture trickled down the back of his neck. He thought he heard the piercing shrieks of the sow, the neighing and roaring of all the animals rising behind him in pursuit. He collapsed in a refreshing, freezing fit of sobbing—and looked skywards, and there fell over him the soft mantle of the immensity of the stars.

FOR A NEW RESURRECTION

By N. G. KATHFORNE

A THIN streamlet of water ran tirelessly out of the fountain, forming a tiny brook, glistening as rock crystal and tortuous as a serpent; all day, women came there to fill their water jars, and peasants passed by to and from work with their beasts. Three tall plane trees stood as fixed sentinels, gently murmuring at times under the breath of the breeze. A little to the right of the fountain, leaning against the trunk of a tree, lay, always in the same place, the beggar Panayotis, the Lamé One as the villagers called him, and repeated ceaselessly:

"If I am not lost I am sane. Yet I am not sane since I remain here, and I am not lost since I know what I am doing. Brethren, give me your alms."

The passers-by and the women who came to the well would give him a coin, listen to his words, wonder and laugh at him. He, with drooping head, as one who is ashamed of his evil deeds, would glance covertly, first at his missing hand, then at his missing foot, and ever came back to these same absurd sentences, like a man stifling within his four prison walls, pacing ever monotonously up and down.

He had not yet acquired the habit of his beggar's profession, for a short time before he had been in hospital, well cared for, where science had completed the work begun by the war and had amputated his right hand and his left foot.

Before going into the hospital he had been a soldier, and before that he had been free as a bird, in his mountain village, singing and whistling merrily at his work. He had no land of his own, so hired himself out to the farmers to earn a living for his mother and sister. Extras were provided for by a side occupation: he fished with explosives

and, to avoid trouble with the police, sold the fish in strictest secrecy.

In those days he loved a maid and intended marrying her. So in his spare time, with the help of a cousin who was a carpenter by trade, he worked at putting a second story to his little house, so his mother and sister might continue to live there when he married. Until then they would do as they had ever done, as all his compatriots do who have only one room to serve as bedroom, kitchen, living and dining room, sleep all together: the two women on a large bed and he on a small one.

Suddenly there came the war. He knew not how or why, but found himself caught up in a kind of tornado, in a hell where thousands and thousands of men fought and killed each other on hills and plain with diabolical machines. He saw them. He heard the groans of the wounded, the last gurgle of the dying. In the midst of this infernal dance, he suddenly felt himself collapsing into unconsciousness, with just one fleeting, vivid impression that the earth had opened up and was swallowing him up into the depths of its flaming entrails. In the hospital, when he returned to consciousness, he was overwhelmed with kindness and praise for having shed his blood and mortified his flesh for his country; so little by little he acquired the belief that it is not so great a misfortune to die or become maimed on the battlefield. He even began to feel a throb of pride in his own terrible sacrifice. His companions read newspaper articles to him in which the wounded were styled "glorious heroes" and a Sister assured him that the country was a good, affectionate mother to her children, full of gratitude for her heroes.

He heard so much talk about his country that gradually the conception of it as a loving mother became fixed in his brain. Thus it was that, on leaving the hospital, minus a hand and plus a pair of crutches, and going down into the town, although now but half a man, he walked with ostentatious pride. The first time he felt men's eyes on him, he looked coyly down, as if meaning to say: "Come, come, I have not achieved very much after all. I have merely done my duty."

In the train, going back to his native village, fellow travelers asked him sympathetically where and how he had got his wounds, so he told them his tale in vivid, enthusiastic language. Some of them patted him on the back, and some cried "Bravo," and one man told him he was a real hero.

His heart was bursting with proud happiness. Ah, what a fine thing it was to suffer for one's country and earn such sweet praise and love from all the world! What a loving sound these words have: My country! Through the monotonous rattle of the train, he fancied he could hear the sound of patriotic songs, regimental ditties, the national anthem, the bugle calls, the noise of battle. And his heart swelled out with fresh joy, his soul with new pride.

His face was beaming as he dreamed of the return to the village, and how he would be received by his mother and sister. Poor women! How they would caress him and beg him to tell them his tale, and how the neighbours and all the villagers would cluster round and praise him and cry out "Bravo!"

Three hours' journey from his destination, two men entered his compartment at a wayside station. He looked at them attentively and soon recognised them; they were from his village, both of them landlords and well-to-do. He had often worked for them. They noticed him, whispered together, then one of them said to him:

"Are you not Panayotis, from our village?"

Aloud he answered "Yes," and to himself he added: "I am the glorious hero who has given one hand and one foot for his country."

The men looked at him with pity, seemed a trifle embarrassed as they shook hands with him, and with a show of emotion enquired how he felt. When he answered "Very well indeed, thanks, though I seem to have lost half my body," they cried out in sincere sympathy: "Poor lad! What a terrible misfortune!"

These words hit him hard. He had expected them to do as the others, in the hospital, in the train, people he did not know at all, but who had praised him and demanded his story. Instead of that, they merely gazed at him, sadly,

pitifully. Was he not a glorious hero to them? Perhaps they were jealous of his glory . . . yes, that must be it. The rascals! Shame on them, to be from his own village! But they were speaking again: "Poor Panayotis! You are the first to come back in such a state. What frightful ill-luck!"

Resentfully, he snapped out, "Oh, never mind!"

Then they started enquiring about friends at the front. He answered drily, laconically, saying to himself: "You are not worthy to speak with a hero."

On arriving at the village, he saw a number of acquaintances at the station. They seemed to hesitate, then, recognising him, came forward and greeted him timidly, with an air of condoling with him for the death of some loved one. In their eyes, in their manner, he read that they pitied him. But, why should they? Did not they understand that they had a glorious hero before them? Did they not read the newspapers? Did they not know, these stupid fellow-villagers, what the people in the hospital, in the town, all knew, that it was a privilege to lose half one's body in the service of one's country? They must know it! But the wretches were jealous . . . ah well, it is not given to everyone to be a glorious hero. So he approached his home.

"Mother at least will not be jealous," he reflected, "she will see me with pride, and clasp her hero in her arms!"

And lo, a few paces away, was his mother with another old woman, coming towards him. They had been told of his return.

"Mother!" he cried, hastening on as best he could. But she stopped dead and looked at him with wide-open eyes, and wrung her hands in despair. And the other woman too, stopped and gazed at him horror-stricken.

"Mother! Do you not recognise me, your Panayotis?"

"Ah . . ." she groaned, and flung her arms round his neck, weeping bitterly: "How have you come back thus mutilated? How was it done? My boy! My little boy!"

He marveled at her tears. What was this? Did she too, feel nothing but pity for him? She could not be jealous of him . . . that was impossible.

He wanted to tell her she must not cry, that if he had

come back lame, it was because he had sacrificed himself for his country, because he was a glorious hero. But, somehow, for the first time these words sounded empty, meaningless to him. His mother's tears robbed them of sense. Words stuck in his throat, died out on his lips.

With head downcast, he followed her into the house, where his sister lay abed. The old woman told him the reason was that for the last three months she had suffered from rheumatism. He approached her; she too took fright on seeing him, and started weeping.

Till late that evening, relatives and neighbours came in to greet him, and sympathise with him. Not one said "Bravo," not one called him a glorious hero. When he found himself alone at last, on his bed, at night, he revolved all these strange things in his mind, and for the first time there dawned on him the extent of his misfortune. He felt with his one hand the mutilated members and thrilled with horror. How could he now earn a living for mother and sister? He had been told that, in his absence, so long as Coula had been well, things had gone all right, but since her illness, God alone knew how the two women managed to live. What would become of them now, when neither he nor they could work? What God knew the answer to that riddle? And why had men hidden the truth from him all that time? Why these congratulations from the officers in the hospital? Why had the Sisters told him Greece was a loving mother, well worth sacrificing half one's body for? Why did the newspapers call these poor wretches "glorious heroes" and mock them with the words? Cruel, evil bandits, all of them!

He had a sudden sensation of being caged in. He shuddered. Then he thought a long time about the others he had seen like himself, in barracks, on the battlefield, in hospital. They were all caged in. He remembered as a boy, setting snares for the birds. He would make a hollow under a stone and prop up the stone with little twigs. In the hollow, he would put some worms. The birds came to eat the worms, and the stone fell down and held them prisoners.

In the army he had been told there were snares for bigger animals too, for lions and wolves, and bears.

They were all caught, all caged in.

Patriotic enthusiasm and jingo phrases, flags and bands, reviews and ceremonies, kings and generals with resplendent uniforms were but the bait. War was the snare. And the country, Greece, stood above it all, snapping up the bodies of men, biting off their hands and feet, drinking their warm blood. . . . In some corner of that all-devouring stomach, his own hand and foot rested at this moment!

With unutterable rage, he bit his pillow, cursed himself for having let himself be caught in the snare, cursed mankind because there had been no man to warn the victims of the approaching doom, to cry out: "Halt! You are being deceived . . . a great, savage beast is lying in wait for you."

Now his mother, his real mother, needed him, needed his hand and foot to earn a living; she had to undergo privations, perhaps would have to die of hunger.

Ah, what folly had been his! He had been a fool. . . . With this thought came sleep. He was tired out with anguish of soul.

On waking the next morning, he felt a great sorrow that lay on his being like a vast black coverlet. The evening's thoughts came back to him. Formerly, the black thoughts of the night had vanished in the morning like mist at the touch of the sun. But these remained. It was as if they had run through his brain like burning torches and seared it with incurable wounds. The light of day no longer dispelled the darkness of the night; on the contrary, it too cried out to him his folly.

He sighed and looked around him. There was fire in the hearth, and Coula lay on the big bed opposite, her face towards him, looking at him.

Stretched out on her bed, with black hair and eyes, and brown complexion, she was beautiful; she did not look ill. Her eyes, particularly, burned with such fire that one would have thought her about to spring out and run about the house and the yard, and fill the whole place with joy. Yet on closer examination he saw she had vastly changed in the three years of his absence. Her breasts had filled out and lay on the bedsheets like little soft pillows.

He sated his eyes on her beauty and thought of the future. Even if she escaped her sickness, she would not escape starvation. Were she perfectly healthy, no man would have her for a wife. Yet he would be a lucky fellow who would get her . . . had she not been his sister, he himself would not have hesitated. . . .

This thought filled him with shame, so he got up and started slowly dressing himself with his one hand. He asked Coula where the mother was as he needed her, not being able to wash himself.

"She is not here, Panayotis," she answered, "she has gone somewhere, but will be back soon."

He sat down by his sister, saying in a low voice: "Then let us wait for her."

For a few minutes they remained silent; he, with bent head, thinking what a fool he had been, she gazing at him. Then, brusquely, he looked up and enquired: "What has she gone out for, and why does she stay so long?"

The young girl hesitated, then said:

"She has gone out to . . . to get some coffee for you."

The words fell slowly on him, one by one, hurting him more than the bullets he had stopped. No, he had not expected this. He hardly trusted his ears, yet surely he had heard aright. His sister had not said "buy . . ."

He looked straight into her eyes and, fearing the words he might hear, asked:

"She has not gone to . . . beg coffee for me?"

She half closed her eyes and made no answer.

Utterly broken, he muttered: "God . . . I did not expect this . . ."

In imagination he saw his mother knocking on door after door, begging for a few grains of coffee . . . chased away rudely from some houses, humiliated in others by refusals. What had the poor woman done that, in her old age, she should be exposed to such shame? It was his fault, he who had been a fool. Biting remorse seized hold of him. Something occurred to him, that made him shudder; during these last three months of his absence, while his sister had been ill, his mother must have gone begging.

"So . . . Mother is a beggar, Coula?"

"No, no," she replied hastily, "only for today, for your sake . . . she had no coffee for you . . . she cried about it . . . then went out to . . . to fetch some . . ."

He read the lie in her eyes. A sardonic voice cried out within him: "While in the hospital, men called you a glorious hero, your mother was begging her bread. Ha, ha! Glorious heroes with beggar mothers!" The voice irritated him; angrily, he addressed his sister:

"See here, don't stuff me up with lies. How did you manage to exist during the three months of your illness?"

She blushed, and her eyes were filmed with fear as she stammered:

"B—but, has Mother n—not told you?"

"Mother merely said God alone knew . . . but you know a good deal more about it than God. Come, tell me . . . how did you manage?"

"Don't ask me, Panayotis. I don't know. I was ill. Mother knows."

Her eyes filled with tears. When he saw that, he shook his head sadly and said:

"Poor little mother! How you must have suffered! And all on my account . . ."

Tears ran down his cheeks and he sobbed till he seemed to choke. His sister, who had hardly understood his words, marveling at the extent of his sorrow, remarked:

"It is not only Mother who has suffered. I too have had much to bear, even more . . ."

But he did not hear her; through the mad throbbing in his ears, he fancied he could discern terrible cries of malediction on him.

Just then the old woman appeared on the threshold; a tall, thin woman with blue eyes and careworn face. She stopped in wonder at the scene. Coula saw her and warned her brother: "Here's Mother, Panayotis."

He wiped his eyes and turned his head: "Ah, you have come back, Mother? Poor little Mother. . . . What humiliations this coffee must have cost you. . . . But there is an end to it now. You have abased yourself enough. It is my turn now. And you were innocent; you had done nothing to deserve it. It was my fault . . . I was a fool

. . . I did not stop to think what I was doing when I let myself be lured by the bait, and fell into the snare and gave up a hand and a foot to the wild beast. . . . Mine is the fault so mine, too, must be the humiliation." He rose and walked out of the house as quickly as he could on his one leg and his crutch.

The women were speechless.

Alone in the street he half stopped, full of fear, of disillusion, of uncertainty. Whither now? What was he to do? Become a beggar? He, the "glorious hero"? No, not a glorious hero but a fool, who by his folly had brought his family to destitution, his old mother to shame. He must bear his punishment; men should mock him, laugh at him. They should see him ever before them, from morning till night, with his one foot and his one hand. They should give him alms, they should call him wretched. Only thus could he still his remorse and save his mother from further abasement.

Now to choose a good beggar's stand. The fountain, of course. He should go there. Half the village went there to draw water. It was like a public square. Peasants went by there on their way to the fields and travelers going to the neighbouring villages. Someone in the crowd would take pity on him; some woman perhaps, now the one, now the other, would bring him something from her house.

He had made no mistake in his choice. In the beginning indeed, no one dare pass him by without giving him a copper or two, and the women never failed to bring him something. True, little by little the alms thinned out, but there was always enough at the day's end to get something to eat.

With the peasant's natural curiosity, many of the passers-by asked him to tell them all about his wounds. But he, who in the train had been so voluble in giving details to indifferent strangers, refused all satisfaction to his fellow villagers who gave him alms. He felt the shame of begging sufficiently; he would not add the further humiliation of telling the details of the folly that had brought on his misfortune. Then he did not remember very clearly . . . his memory was confused; blood, groans, weepings, curses, the killing of men, the burning of houses, all these things

danced about in disordered array in his brain. He could hardly understand how he had escaped from it all, how he found himself there, begging. He looked at the fields where he had worked long ago, the sea where he had plied his fishing with explosives; he thought of his joyous toil in the open, of the happy times when, free as a bird, he had run hither and thither, jumping ditches and scaling cliffs. And he heard the call of the hills and the fields and the sea and the sun, imperiously beckoning to him.

He felt he belonged to the fields, he was destined for the sea, he was drawn by the hills. He was of them, he could not imagine himself without them. He went to them by instinct, as he breathed by instinct. Now that he lay there, one foot sore and the other cut off, one hand leaning on something or other, and the other gone forever, he could not believe that he was himself, Panayotis. Or, if he was, then he must be lost, insane.

So one day, he said: "If I am not lost, I am sane. But I am not sane since I am here . . ."

But he knew why he was there. It was not mere chance, neither was it for the purpose of begging. He was there, he remained there in order to undergo humiliation, to expiate his folly, to punish himself for having deserted his mother for the wild beast that had devoured his hand and foot that were so necessary to him and his.

"I am not lost, since I know what I am doing."

In these everlastingly repeated words he had locked in his thought, his life, himself, as in a dungeon, and it was through these words that people got to know him. People did not understand the words, and laughed at them; but he understood them very thoroughly. They held the whole tragedy of his soul.

"Brethren, give me your alms."

Yet in receiving these alms he never thanked the giver. Thanks is a habit of beggars, and he was no beggar; he was the butt of all men.

* * * * *

With the coming of spring and the first warm rays of the sun, strange thoughts came to him. From his chosen

post he could see the hills with their narrow gorges, their cliffs, their paths, and the plain spread out before him, a vast green expanse in a curious patchwork of various shades, and further on the sand of the shore, and the infinite sea, calm and blue. Above them all the vast dome of the skies, blue also and clear, resting on the one side on the tops of the hills and on the other on the white crests of the waves. The spring air was limpid as crystal, and the soft light set everything out in minute, sharp detail.

He looked at the sun-bathed trees, and the hills and the sea, and fancied they were all newborn of that all-transcending, all-embracing light. All things seemed to have but one soul, and that soul shed itself out in light.

He felt himself ceasing to be a man: he was becoming a hill, and his soul too was merged in that great light.

It was the first time he experienced this, and it appeared strange to him.

All day long he lay motionless and followed with absorbed interest the mysterious processes of growing leaves and budding flowers. All around him something new was being created; and, since in this state of mind he compared himself to a tree, he became convinced that spring would produce something new within himself also. What would it be? He knew not. But surely there would be something; it was impossible that all things should be renewed and he remain the sole exception.

He spent hours and days in such reflections, only wending his way homewards when night had totally obscured the objects of his study. His sister was still abed and his mother showed a chronic anxiety, as if fearing some new calamity. Pahayotis was becoming gradually gruffer in his attitude towards them.

"How are you?" he would ask his sister.

"Just the same," she would invariably answer. He had been back five months now, and she was ever the same.

One day he said to her:

"Well, poor Coula, you are to be pitied. You will die on that bed."

She did not answer, but started crying, which made him sorry for what he had said.

The great Easter Feast was a fortnight hence, and the uneasiness of the two women was growing steadily. The slightest thing made them afraid. Often they would converse in whispers, and when he demanded to know why, his mother would answer:

"Only women's matters, my child, with which men have nought to do."

"Ah!" he grunted with a show of indifference, and let the matter drop.

One night on coming home from the fountain he found his sister very pale, and his mother nervously, with trembling hands, preparing something for her on the fire.

"What's the matter?" he enquired. "I have never seen you look like that before."

Coula did not reply, but merely turned her head to the wall, and it was the mother who said:

"She is sick . . . nothing new . . . she is sick."

He asked no more questions.

That night he dreamed that someone was dragging his foot, trying to tear it off, and woke up in terror. He heard a noise at the door, and, being still under the influence of the nightmare, imagined some one was trying to break in in order to tear off his foot.

"Who is there?" he cried out in anguish. But there was no answer. "Who is there? At the door? Do you not hear?"

The trembling voice of his mother replied: "It is I, my child. Don't shout so."

"Well, why did you not answer me? Where are you going to at such a time of night?"

"Oh, just outside for a minute . . ."

"Shut the door and don't be long."

"I will be back quickly . . ."

He remained awake and waited. Darkness and silence were alike intense and he had the feeling that something ominous was lurking in the night. His sister made no sound, but he was sure she was awake, too, and kept quiet as if she, too, had a presentiment of evil. And his mother . . . where could she have gone to at this hour?

"Coula!" he cried.

No reply.

"Coula! Why don't you speak? You are not asleep."

"What is it?" she muttered in a feeble voice.

"How are you feeling?"

"A little better."

"Why are you not sleeping?"

"Mother woke me up."

Then again silence.

"Coula . . . I was dreaming some one was tugging at my foot to tear it off. I feel sure some calamity is impending."

Silence still.

"Where are the matches? I want to light up, but my crutches are not within reach and I don't know where the matches are. You see, Coula, Mother is not here, and without her we are powerless . . . we cannot even light the gas . . . we are like dead folk."

"Oh," she shuddered, "do not speak of the dead."

"You are afraid? But . . . where can Mother have gone to? What can she be up to thus in the night? Something might happen to her . . ."

"Oh, nothing will happen to her. She will be here directly."

They lapsed into silence. He still waited expectantly, but in vain. At long last he heard her steps in the yard, hurried, as if some one were in pursuit of her.

"Is that you, Mother?"

"Yes."

"Where were you? What kept you so long?"

No answer.

"Light the gas, Mother."

Silence.

"Don't you hear, Mother? I am asking you to light the gas."

"But why? Come, go to sleep . . . it is night."

"I cannot sleep, and neither can Coula. You will not be able to sleep either, so light the gas and we will talk. I will relate to you what happened to me last year at this time."

"I have no idea where the matches are. Go to sleep."

"Oh, Mother, why are you unkind? You know I cannot get up, and yet you behave thus . . . come, light up. I am afraid."

Seeing it was useless, he wrapped himself up in the bed-clothes and started crying. Oh, the bitterness of tears in the dark. . . .

The next morning his mother woke him up: "Get up and get you to the fountain . . . lots of people are passing by there just now . . . you are late."

He opened his eyes, dressed himself as best he could and went out. But he felt very sad that morning; night had left her shadows on his soul.

"If I am not lost I am sane. Yet I am not sane, since I am here, and I am not lost, since I know what I am doing. Brethren, give me your alms."

He felt himself singularly alone, a stranger to this nature full of driving sap, to this pure and tender light that flooded all things. He looked at the passers-by more timidly than his wont.

Noon was drawing near and most of the peasants had gone by; only a few women came from time to time to fetch water. Here for instance was Mother Basilo, her water jar in her hand. She always brought him something, but today she cried to him from afar:

"So you are there, are you? You are not interested in what is happening at home? Your house is surrounded by the gendarmes. The devil take you all, you brood of evil . . . dishonouring the village, and this holy week. . . . Well, what are you looking at me like that for? The child was found in the glen, half eaten up by the dogs . . . is it not your sister's?"

Motionless, speechless, with distended eyes, he listened to her, ranting on till she had finished filling her jar and had gone. He felt himself sinking in some abyss, being drawn down into the depths of the sea. He wanted to get up, to run home, to see what was happening, but seemed incapable of motion. . . . So that was the evil that had lurked in the night. . . .

"Get up! The commissary wants to see you," called out a gendarme who was hurrying up.

Panayotis let his eyes drop and remained still. As a soldier he had not loved the gendarmes; his comrades called them "bulls" and he had had many a tussle with them. But then he had not been lamed in those days, and his sister had not borne a child.

"Well, do you not hear me? Get up!"

With a great effort he struggled up and followed him painfully. As they neared the house, he saw two gendarmes carrying a chair on which was seated his sister, hiding her face in her hands. His mother walked behind, with bent head, then two more gendarmes. The windows and doors of the neighbouring houses were crowded with curious onlookers, mostly women and children. He felt as if some invisible hand were gouging out his eyes and tearing out his heart.

"Come on!" said the gendarme.

He followed him, machinelike. He was surely going mad. The fleeting shadow crossed his memory of a madman he had encountered one day in the train, who kept on saying: "What I have said, I have said."

Three more men were coming out of the house, talking animatedly; they were the commissary, the local justice and the police doctor.

Seeing the lame man, the justice remarked to the commissary: "We don't need him. Our investigation has revealed nothing against him."

"All right, let him go then," said the commissary to the gendarme.

The crowd was moving off; he remained there, trembling, dazed with suffering. He wanted to run after them, to insult them, to hit them . . . but all he could do was to shout: "You miserable wretches!"

"What's that you said?" enquired the commissary.

"What I have said, I have said," answered Panayotis, and without further speech dragged himself into the house, and shut the door violently behind him, and fell on the floor in a faint.

* * * * *

During the ensuing three days Panayotis did not go out; the blow had completely paralysed him. He neither ate nor

drank, but to make up for it slept a great deal. From time to time he would awake to the full consciousness of his situation and would feel terrible stings of remorse, accusing himself of having brought this calamity on his mother and sister. At other times he imagined they had done this thing to punish him, to bring shame upon him; then he fell to cursing them vehemently, raining great blows with his clenched fists on his pillow the while, and biting the bed-sheets, crying out: "Infamous women!"

Then he would start calculating when this could have happened to his sister. He had been back seven months now, and his mother had told him that Coula had fallen ill of rheumatism three months before that. Seven and three make ten. One month they must have lived on their little store of money and maybe, on begging. Then, faced with starvation—at the very time when he was being fêted as a "glorious hero" in hospital—the mother must have taken to playing the *entremetteuse* for the daughter, and the girl, confined to the house, must have . . . received, now one man, now another.

This thought made him mad. He imagined these men were in the room, on the bed. He started cursing them, threatening to kill them . . . then he reflected they were hardly to blame; his sister was a fine-looking girl. No doubt, too, it had been cheap enough. . . . Then he cursed his mother, saying:

"Better you had died of starvation!"

Exhausted by these paroxysms of rage, he would lie down, anywhere, on the hard floor, and fall asleep like an animal.

Sometimes the neighbours looked in at him through the window, and, if he was awake, he shouted out angrily: "Get out of there! Get you gone to the devil!"

Every evening he heard the church bells tolling for holy-week services and this suggested many thoughts to him. The sound of the bells fell on his soul like music, like a soothing balm for his sore heart. He did not know why, but he took pleasure in listening to them; then, when they ceased, his martyrdom started afresh, or else deep sleep.

On Easter eve he lay on his bed, more exhausted than usual by his fast and his sorrow; he was almost uncon-

scious, plunged in a state of psychic stupor; yet, however feebly, he was wondering: "Are the bells not going to ring tonight?"

Hours were spent thus, and his soul was sick at not hearing the bells. "No, they will not ring tonight . . ."

But suddenly joyous peals rang out in the air and poured consolation into his heart. As if preparing to receive a loving friend, he half rose on his bed and listened with a smile. He seemed to hear the sound of rifle fire from the church. Ah, yes, they were firing a salvo, and they had rung the bells, for the coming of Easter.

"Easter . . ." he muttered, and somehow the word seemed to give him a sensation of joy, like a man who comes home after a long journey and finds his loved ones again.

Easter. . . . He had almost forgotten it, yet on that day it was the Christ had risen from the dead.

The house was in darkness, but through the half-open window a ray of moonlight was gliding in.

He wanted to see light, a great light . . . leaning on his crutches, he struggled to the window and opened it wide and looked out. The village, the hills, the plain, the sea, were all flooded with light. They seemed different to him somehow. The bells were still ringing and the guns discharging. Within him there was so great a joy that he wanted to leap up and sing and weep all at the same time for very happiness. Under his breath he murmured:

"Christ is risen . . ."

The bells tolled back:

"Christ is risen . . ."

He was profoundly moved; he bent his head and wept quietly. And soon the sound of the bells died out. . . .

A sense of loneliness, of desolation spread once more over him; fear gripped his heart, and like a threatened animal, he drew back from the window, back into the darkness. Memory evoked a series of vague nightmares before him: the war, his wounds, the return home with but half a body, his mother, his sister. . . . Bitter visions, tumultuous and poisonous, they tore his heart and tugged at his throat.

"How evil men are . . ." he cried out in pain. As if the

better to hear the words, he repeated them: "How evil men are!"

A light of triumph appeared in his face.

He had discovered the cause of the war, of his mother's and his sister's misfortunes. It was just this: that men were evil. Feverishly he started thinking things out anew.

Had men not been evil, he, a poor, ingenuous peasant, would not have been lured away to give up half his body in the wars. Had men not been evil, they would not have troubled his sister in her hour of sorrow, nor him in his hour of solitude. Ah, being evil, they could not understand what it means to lose a hand and a foot, to see one's mother and sister carried off to jail.

Evil men . . . yet they are this night celebrating the risen Christ. The same who had put his sister in the way of sin.

Evil men, today praising the risen Christ, and yesterday they crucified and buried him. Priests set Him up on the cross; priests today sing in triumph "Christ is risen!"

His thought flew to the Crucified Son of Man, head bent, hands stretched and feet nailed to the cross.

Panayotis reflected that Christ had had better luck; He had been hung, once and for all, He had not seen His mother and sister carried off to prison. Men called Him the Son of God. What then was he whom they had crucified a thousand times over? Was he not also Son of God?

The evil men do had led to Christ's crucifixion. The evil men do had led to his own martyrdom. And there were myriads such as he. Every day the hospitals disgorged their cargoes of lame and mutilated men. They were all Little Christs.

But for all that, the evil of men has not abated. There are more who are sound than unsound. To do away with evil, all men should become Little Christs.

This one idea remained burned into his consciousness. He knelt on his one foot and, leaning on his one hand, murmured:

"O, Christ of mine, this night will I fill the earth with Little Christs, then thy kingdom will come. For ever and ever, amen."

Then he rose. Moonlight streamed over him and there was no trace of pain on his face; nothing but infinite, serene content, and a strange firmness in his eyes. He knew what he had to do to fill the earth with Little Christs and make the evil men do to disappear. He went back to the window and, looking at the trees, he recalled how he had likened himself unto them and expected that, like them, like the whole of nature, he would have something renewed within him with the coming of spring. This, this was the something new; the resurrection he would achieve this night among his fellows, this new resurrection that would make of them all Little Christs.

Tired out, faint, he groped for the ladder that led to the loft where. . . . But . . . the evil men do. . . .

He had great difficulty in struggling up; once or twice he almost fell. Presently he succeeded and started searching for the explosives he had used for fishing in the old days and had concealed near the window. He found them speedily and his eyes lit up. Hark . . . the bells are ringing once more and the salvos are cracking again.

"Wait," he shouted triumphantly, "I am coming! I will make you into Little Christs. This night is the New Resurrection!"

And he groped his way towards the ladder to go down. But in the darkness he missed the first rung, slipped, lost his crutch, and fell headlong. His forehead hit a protruding nail and was severely wounded.

* * * * *

On the morrow they found him, quite dead, at the foot of the ladder. His face was full of blood and in his hand he held the sticks of dynamite. His eyes were wide open; one of them clotted with blood, but the other, still shining in death, seemed to ask:

"Who will fire them now?"

CALIBAN

By HEENDRICK VANDEMERE

HAD Jan Overbeek's lot been cast in the purlieus of Montparnasse, he might have made a fortune as a model. That is, as a Caliban, though hardly as Adonis. That strange, unhealthy, morbid company of artist degenerates who foregather in the "Dome" and the "Rotonde" would have vied with each other in getting his monstrous figure to pose for them. In bronze and in oils, in plaster and even in water-colour, his uncouth features would have blotched the walls of the Salon des Independants, and might conceivably have slipped by accident into the real Salon. For even the Salon jury has respect for ugliness, provided it be signed by a fashionable or at least an orthodox name.

Jan Overbeek might have been happy thus. Who knows? As it was, he was profoundly, dejectedly unhappy.

He knew nothing of Montparnasse or studios. The only artist he had ever seen was a scraggy, obsolescent English spinster with yellow teeth who had settled for a month at Warnebeecke and assiduously sketched every barge, windmill and baggy pantaloons in the sleepy Dutch village.

Sleepy it was, though Jan would not have so described it, having known none other in the twenty-odd years of his life. His only break had been two years' stolid, dazed existence with the colours, during the Great War, on the frontier, in the sandy country around Maastricht.

Across the border, in occupied Belgium, he had seen dull grey figures flitting to and fro, or standing still for hours like mud-cakes. And he had vaguely wondered whether among these strange folk from over the Rhine, who caused such pother in the world, there was one as ugly as himself.

For he knew his ugliness. And thereby hangs a tale. That, indeed, is the tale, the whole tale.

He could not quite recall the day when this knowledge had first dawned on him. It seemed such long ages ago. And it had grown steadily, painfully, irrevocably, eating like a cancer into his soul, poisoning and stenching his existence.

He had a fairly accurate conception of this ugliness of his. Thick, pendulous lips, a steam-rolled nose, broad at the base, almost receding on a profile view. Sandy, or perhaps straw-coloured hair, straggly, and, despite all the arts of the village barber, ever bristling with rat-tails. A fair chin, the only redeeming feature. Monstrous ears, the redness of which contrasted with the pale, pasty, puffed-out cheeks. Altogether an unhealthy, repulsive appearance. On the left temple, eating far into the cheek, a vast birth-mark, purple and coarse, like curdled wine.

Nor was his body better constructed than the head it supported. Inordinately long, thin arms, that swung in his stride; short, powerful legs with a distinct bow in them that gave his walk something of the waddle of a duck. Large, clumsy feet as a foundation.

This day he lay stretched out in the long grass by the placid grey canal. Over the pale blue sky, long wisps of cloud were trailing slowly. The distant sea was draped in mist, whether of dampness or of coming heat.

A couple of barges were floating lazily on the canal, the men smoking their pipes on deck while a woman tended a row of bright-coloured flower boxes. In the great flat meadows on the other bank, cattle browsed peacefully. A row of poplars a mile off marked the emplacement of the village.

Jan was thinking, as ever, of his ugliness. He was wondering exactly when the knowledge of it had dawned.

There were dim recollections of his early childhood. How his father had almost unconsciously shuddered at times when, on his return from the sea, the boy had leaped at him to embrace him. And one day, when the old man had come home drunk from the "kirmess," he had cursed

violently and told his wife to pack this ugly, deformed son of Satan to bed. He remembered how his mother had wept silently that night, and had come to him in his tiny cupboard-room, and kissed him more tenderly than usual, and stroked his hair and muttered: "My poor, dear Janneke, you will never be ugly in my eyes!"

Ah, well, his father, poor man, was dead long since. Died at sea, and his body never found. That was in the big storm in 1912, when half the fishing fleet was lost and a great steamer went down off the big sandbank, and for days afterwards the shore had been strewn with dead bodies and all kinds of flotsam and jetsam.

Then there was old Vrouw Hoogstraeten, coming out of church one Sunday when he had been but a little lad, and he walking behind her, and overhearing what she said about him. He could hear the words yet in his ears, though that had been good fourteen years ago: "It must be terrible for poor Vrouw Overbeek to have a son like that! The ugliest boy that ever was born in this world, I do believe. The pastor was right today when he spoke of the sins of the fathers being visited on the children. . . . I wonder what sin it was that was punished by such ugliness as that."

And the torture of school! Callous, light-hearted, cruel companions, that repulsed him when he wanted to play with them, and told him gruffly to go play with the Devil, his father. And the masters even seemed to visit the sins of the whole class on him, because they could not abide his looks. And the girls who scoffed and mocked him as he passed by on his way to and from school, and even tiny tots that rubbed their index fingers derisively at him. . . .

The battles he had fought with bigger, stronger boys because of their insults, till all the school knew he was not to be trifled with, and all but one or two left him alone. . . . But he felt the thoughts they did not utter, and they hurt all the more because, being mere thoughts, he could not bring them to book for them.

After school, the sea. Three years of it, loveless years. A brutish crew and a hard, swearing, bullying master. How he had missed his mother then, the only being who had ever

cared for him, and fondled him, and who could look at him without flinching, with love overflowing in those great, greyish-blue eyes of hers that seemed like a bit of the Holland skies.

Yet this was the only period of his life where the demon of his ugliness had receded into the background. The men had tasted of the quality of those long, nervous arms of his once or twice, and had had their fill. They were linked together by their common fight against the elements, common toils, common danger, and they had just accepted him, sullenly, stolidly.

Finally the war had swept right up to the borders of Holland, and the army had been mobilised to defend the frontiers and guard neutrality. In a trice he had been turned into a soldier. Even then, however, he remembered the stupefied look of mingled astonishment and horror with which the army doctor had greeted him on his appearance before him for his recruit's medical examination.

Here again he had conquered, if not respect, at least silence, by the strength of his arms. All except the sergeant, who, on parade, on the slightest provocation, would expatiate on the clumsiness and ugliness of Private Overbeek. And he could not hit the sergeant. That was against orders. He had seen one man do it, big Wilhelm Younkens, and he had got a long sentence of imprisonment for it. . . .

But chiefly he remembered the army for Peter Broerma. Peter was a youth in his company; straight as a poplar, with silken fair hair and frank blue eyes, and a rosy complexion in his full, smiling face. Strong, too, and merry as could be. As handsome as he, Jan, was ugly. And Jan loved him, as David had loved Jonathan.

To please him, to win a nod from him, to be with him for but a moment at a time, to hear his rich voice sing out "Jan," he would have run through fire and water. Peter was his ideal, his god. There could be none other in the world as fine, as good, as splendid as Peter.

And he had a good heart. Never had he joined the others in leering at their ugly comrade. He even showed some predilection for Jan's company. But only at night, when it was pitch dark, and they could wander about the country-

side, or chat on outpost duty, without either being able to see the other clearly.

That was at once torture and bliss. Bliss to be with Peter, torture to feel that he would not be with him were it not for merciful darkness.

There had been one such night that stood out cruelly. They were both free of duty, and had drifted together on to a sandhill by the Maas River, and sat down in the coarse grass. They had talked long and of many things, and had drawn very near to each other. So beautifully, blissfully near that Jan had for a moment forgotten the curse of his life; the talk had drifted on to the future, after the war, of women and the love of women, of marriage and the begetting of children, the founding of a home, the rearing of a family. Peter had sketched out his ideas on the subject, and Jan started giving his. He had waxed enthusiastic in his speaking, and he drew a rosy picture of the days that were to be when love would come into his life and make it fruitful.

And, suddenly, he had felt a chill. Peter was not assenting, not saying a word. Jan could feel his eyes fixed on him despite the darkness, and with a mighty shock he remembered. He, too, stopped, dead in the middle of a sentence, and there was a moment's embarrassed silence.

Then he sobbed, gently, almost guiltily. Such bliss was not for him. No woman would have him. And Peter knew it and was full of pity for him.

It was Peter who broke the silence. He put his arm round his neck and stroked his hair softly, as his mother had done so often in his boyhood, and spoke at last, slowly, with an indescribable gentleness that was as a balm to the spirit though the acid of the words was keen and burning.

"My poor Jan," he said, "don't take it so much to heart. Life is a curious weaving of compensations. You have a great cross to bear, so great that it is unlikely any woman will ever volunteer to share it with you. But, if that side of life be closed to you, another will surely be open. You are a good fellow, and you will find happiness somewhere else, in work, it may be, or in some other way . . ."

Haltingly, Jan had put a crucial question:

"Peter, tell me truly. Do you think it is impossible any woman should ever care for me?"

He had waited for the answer in an agony of expectation. It seemed ages before Peter replied. His voice was, if possible, gentler than before:

"You ask me a difficult question, Janneke. Difficult because the answer must hurt if I answer you truly, and it would not be right of me to deceive you. No, I do not think any woman ever would care enough, not in that way. Miracles may happen of course, and I cannot say. But that is what I think. And I will tell you why I think it, how I know it. You know, Janneke, I am very fond of you—more than of almost anyone—till I have to look at you. And, if I were a woman, great though my love would be, I am sure I could not endure that, day after day, month after month, till the end . . ."

Peter, he felt, was right. For such as Jan Overbeek, there could be no joy of love, nor even of companionship. Wherever he went, he felt women looking at him in startled fashion for a moment, and then turn away their heads. They shunned him as one shuns a leper.

And the worst of it was he understood it all so well that he could feel no anger with them. He would be the same himself.

In the depths of his own heart he worshipped beauty; the beauty of earth and sea, the brilliancy of the sun lighting up the green grass, kissing the still waters, filling the sky with its limitless glory; the snow-white, drifting clouds, fantastic in shape, soft in outline; the rich colour of autumn foliage, like the sunset of the year; the sweet grace of the birds in downward swoop; the music of the bells at eventide. . . .

Beauty, he felt, was life. Outside it there was no life, nothing but corruption and outer darkness. And there was no room for him in the realm of beauty; he had no share in it. He was as an eldest son driven away from home, from his inheritance. Alone throughout the years he would have to carry the burden of his monstrous ugliness, a thing shunned, despised, abhorred.

And in his life no woman's gentle hand would hold sway.

No woman's smile light up his weary path. No woman's voice help and comfort him. No little children's innocent prattle liven up the tidy kitchen of his home, with its red and white tiles and its rows of neat Delft plates. . . . And yet?

There was just one gleam of hope. Perhaps after all Peter had been wrong. Maria Kortelaer might. . . .

Several times of late, she had smiled on him as he had greeted her. He could divine the shudder beneath the smile, but the smile was there. And perhaps in time the smile would wear the shudder away. . . .

She had spoken to him but yesterday, coming out of church, and had given him her hand, a neat, little, tender, brown hand that had lain in his big coarse one for a long, blissful moment.

She had called him "Janneke." No one had ever called him that save his mother and Peter.

Perhaps she had read the mute love in his eyes. Perhaps she had guessed how, at night, he spent hours outside her cottage, watching the roof that sheltered her, dreaming of what might have been—nay, of what might yet be. For surely, there must be a means.

He would go out to sea again. Sailors were not much at home, so she would not see too much of him. In his absence she would make a picture of him in her heart, toning down, softening the hideous lines, and she might love that. . . . Then, when he got home, he would try to be out all day and be with her chiefly at night, in the dark, as he had done with Peter.

And thus he dreamed on. . . .

There was a smile of hope and happiness on his face that transfigured it. Had Maria Kortelaer seen him thus, she might . . . who knows the heart of woman?

Voices woke him out of his reverie. The voices of two men, leaning against the barrier just above him, at his back. He knew the sound of them; one was Piet Kortelaer, Maria's father; the other one was Willem Troelsta, the miller. Piet was talking. From time to time he would tap his pipe out against the barrier and spit.

" . . . Yes, Willem, it had to come. We men rear up

daughters and just when we begin to find pleasure in them, they leave us. It is the way of the world. Well, I think she has chosen wisely. Jacobus is a quiet, steady fellow, and when his father dies he will have a comfortable little income. She might have done much worse . . ."

"I did hear . . . you know how women chatter . . . it was my wife was telling me last night. I did hear that Maria had been a little sweet on that terrible fellow, Jan Overbeek. I am glad nothing came out of that . . . the man is a good enough man, I daresay, but . . ."

More tapping and spitting. Piet's voice was raised.

"God *verdomme!* But I would soon have stopped that! You are right in a way. Maria did show him some kindness, and her mother and I both spoke to her about it. But there was nothing in it. She just felt sorry for the fellow. She has a heart of gold, has my little daughter. She told us quite frankly. She liked him, and had he been . . . well, as other men, she might have gone further with it. But as it is, she laughed at the very idea of marrying a Caliban like that. Caliban? I don't quite know what it means, but that's what she calls him. Some word she picked up at school, I daresay. They teach them a lot of rubbish in the schools nowadays, that it seems to me you and I were the better for being without. But, there you are. I suppose Caliban is some sort of a beast . . ."

"A '*verdommi*' ugly beast then, if Jan Overbeek is anything like it!" laughed the other. "And when is the wedding to be?"

"Very soon, for Jacobus will have to leave in a short time with the fishing fleet. I am going to see the pastor tonight about it . . ."

In the long grass by the placid canal, Jan Overbeek still lay stretched out, motionless.

The clouds had closed down over the sky in a uniform grey, and the mist was spreading slowly from over the sea. No barge was in sight. From the far-off edge of the flat land, the shadows of dusk were gathering to invade the air. . . . Hope and happiness had fled from Jan's face. It was the face of Caliban once more, but with a grimmer, sourer expression than ever. His pasty cheeks seemed livid now,

and contracted into deep lines of suffering. One hot, bitter tear was rolling down slowly. . . .

He rose very wearily. The men's voices were dying down in the distance.

The weariness of Jan's movement was the weariness of a heavy burden. He would have to carry his burden alone, ever alone. To the end. Whenever that might be.

He would pray for it to be soon. He would go to the little cemetery, the "Field of God," and pray by his mother's tomb.

A PAINTER IN THE VILLAGE

By GEZA GARDONY

COMING out of doors, I saw all the children running to the end of the village. I stopped young Burnoz, to find out what was happening.

"There is a gentleman at the top of the village," he said, all out of breath and red in the face, "and he's making a picture."

A "gentleman who's making a picture" must be a painter. I also went to the end of the village, and I found him almost at once.

He was settled on the goose green, among the willows. A little three-footed easel was in front of him, and behind him was Tiennot (short for Etienne) Konczol, flourishing his stick about, to keep back the children. The youngsters, naturally, had climbed up into the trees, and from these points of vantage were watching to see how the miracle was done. Who would ever have imagined that with little sticks like that you could manufacture pictures? Within a week all the children in the village would be painting.

The painter was a blond young man, a mere stripling, with long hair, such as one meets in every corner of the country during the summer. He wore a wide-brimmed soft hat on his head, and a velvet waistcoat, *à l'Italienne*.

The lad was a Hungarian, however. When they told him that the schoolmaster had arrived, he put down his brush and rose.

"My name is Etienne Rez," he said. "I have just come back from Munich, to spend the autumn in my own country and to make some sketches."

"How did you happen to drop into our little village?"

"I really don't know, myself! I go here and there, just as the wind directs. I work a little. In another week I shall be going back."

"But won't you continue your work? We can talk meanwhile."

He was painting a corner of the field, the bridge, the birch tree and some willows by the water side. He took up his brush and recommenced painting, raising his eyes from time to time from his work.

"It's very easy to see that not many men of my trade come here! This village is full of paintable heads, and every one of them is finer than the rest, but every time I have asked one of them to act as a model he has cried out in terror!"

"Heaven knows what they understand by the word 'model,'" I replied. "You should speak to them in their own tongue, Mr. Painter!"

"That's exactly what I've been doing. One of them, a youngster with a bronzed complexion, got over his fear when I offered him five cents, but the rest soon got him away from me. 'Don't let him spoil your face, you idiot!' they told him, and they convinced him so well that I've had to do these wearisome willows over and over again."

"Wait a bit, and I'll get you out of your difficulty. You have only to tell me whom you want to paint."

"Well," he said with his brush in the air, "I've seen one old fellow I'd give everything I have in the world to paint! I even know his name; it's something like Kévési, or Képési, I forget exactly what. He's an old man, a little bent with age. His hair is completely white and his face all red. With his white hair and ruddy cheeks, that man is all colour! gorgeous colours—cinnabar, carmine, cerise, burnt sienna and masses of shadow!"

"That's Kévi!"

"That's his name—Kévi! He lives near the church. I'll slip some blue holes in the carmine round his nose!"

"Very well, then—finish your picture. The old man shall pose!"

"Finish my picture? Not on your life! If you will bring the old boy within reach of my brush, I'll be grateful to you for the rest of my life!"

He packed up his things and we went off at once to find Kévi. The old man was sitting on the trunk of a tree

in the dooryard of his house, smoking his pipe. As we came in at the little gate he prepared to stand up, in order to come to meet us, but I signed to him and gave him to understand that if he got up we should go away. This threat flattered him, and he gaily held out his old wrinkled hand and shook ours boyishly.

"This gentleman," I said, pointing to the painter, "is a man who knows how to make pictures—not those good for nothing things made of paper, but fine pictures, made with oil."

"With oil?"

"Yes—like those of the saints you have seen in church."

"Oh, good!"

"Well, what we have come for, Kévi, is because this gentleman wants to make a picture like that of you."

"Of me? But I'm not a saint!"

"Well, it's not quite that. He wants to paint a big picture with a good many Hungarians in it, and he wants you to be one of them."

Kévi looked at us distrustfully.

"Eh," he said, "I'm too old for things like that. Take my boys—paint them!"

"It is exactly because you are old that I want to paint you," said the painter. "I will paint you as Homer, ruddy with health. That would be a new conception of Homer—blind of one eye only and sitting among the fallen timber, chanting the praises of heroes!"

"What?" growled the old man. "You want to make a *kohér* [the Hungarian for executioner] of me?"

"No, no! not an executioner!" I said, trying to calm the old boy.

And the painter added, "A Greek, called Homer."

"A Greek?" repeated the old man, once more fearful.

"Ah, you don't understand," I said, again trying to soothe him, "it will be only the picture that will be Greek."

Inwardly I wished something would strike the painter dumb, at least for a quarter of an hour. Unfortunately my painter wished at any price to take his part in the task of persuading the old man.

"It will only be a matter of adding a suitable beard to your head," he said.

"Then you can be sure I won't do it!" retorted the old man furiously. "I am very pleased to see you, Sir, but I won't do it!"

"Oh, shut up!" I said to the painter, "and let me do the talking."

The painter, quite upset, went and sat on the edge of the well and, taking up his brush, began to paint the hayloft.

Meantime, the women had come out of the house, and I addressed myself to them.

"You see, my good woman," I said to the old man's wife, "here we are in the midst of it. This gentleman is a painter, who has come a very long way to paint some pictures in our village. He wants to paint the finest child, the most beautiful woman and the handsomest old man. It isn't my fault if he considers Father Kévi the best looking of the old men in the village. In any case, he isn't asking much of him. All he wants is for Kévi to remain sitting down in front of him for a quarter of an hour—but Father Kévi won't! But what an honour it will be, when the painter exhibits his portrait of Father Kévi in foreign countries, and says: 'Come and see, emperors and kings, what handsome old men there are in Hungary!' Praise and blessings will fall in showers on Father Kévi's head. They will even talk about him in the newspapers."

"Why won't you?" asked the old woman, in a supplicating tone.

"There are plenty of youngsters," responded the old man, a trifle softened. "You can't teach an old dog like me new tricks!"

"But, my good Father Kévi, a young man would be useless where what is wanted is a veteran! What would you say, for instance, if you saw a picture where St. Peter was represented with the face of a man of twenty-five?"

"Look, there's our loft!" cried young Imre, who was standing behind the painter.

And there, spread out all in yellow on the painter's canvas was the hayloft. Even the big walnut tree was shown.

The rough sketch pleased the old man also.

"That's good," he said. "Make me look as big a fool as you like! I'll do it, to please Mr. Schoolmaster!"

He stood up and turned to go into his bedroom.

"Give me my best suit," he said to his wife.

"Oh, you've no need to change your clothes," said the painter. "I only want to paint your head."

"My head? And what sort of a fool shall I look without arms or legs?"

I made a sign to the painter not to speak.

"You will appear to be looking out of the window, Father Kévi," I told him. "Those who saw you from the street wouldn't be able to see either your hands or your legs, would they?"

The old man grasped this, but all the same he went indoors, in order to put on his best clothes. His soul insisted that, whether his clothes were painted or not, the hour in which his features were to be placed for all eternity was a solemn one.

He sat down in his chair and remained motionless. He placed himself in the hands of the painter.

Silence brooded over the dooryard. The painter, with a sure and rapid hand, sketched in the outline of the head upon the canvas. He touched in the nose, the moustache, and splashed in the deep chestnut colour round the head.

"It's beginning all right," observed the shoemaker, who was leaning over the fence, "but it isn't him yet!"

In a short time the painter had put in the red for the face and white for the hair. The wrinkles were not yet indicated, while the forehead was still only a splash of colour; but Mother Kévi, clapping her hands together, cried:

"My word, he was just like that twenty years ago!"

Old Kévi took not the slightest interest in what he had been like twenty years before, and continued quietly smoking his pipe in his armchair. The spectators in the dooryard became more and more numerous.

Among the others, Bozitsy's wife came to see what was going on. She is a mournful and skinny little woman. Why she did so I don't know, but she had certainly put on the black dress she wears on holidays. Some of the other

women also came to see what was happening, but they only looked in as though in passing, and soon went back to their work. The little Bozitsy woman alone stayed and watched the growing picture attentively.

"How much are you going to pay for that?" she whispered. "What does it cost?"

"Goodness, you're not going to have your picture done, are you?"

"My heavens, no! I was only asking—that's all!"

"Well, nothing, then!" replied Mother Kévi. "We shall not have to pay anything. He is painting my husband merely to amuse himself. It's coming up fine, isn't it?"

"Whatever you do, Kévi, don't move your ear!" cried the shoemaker, leaning on his elbows on the fence. "He's just putting it in."

The old man kept his ear very steady.

The marveling increased every minute. By the end of a quarter of an hour the dooryard was filled with delighted laughter and astonishment.

"It's exactly like him, exactly like him!" everybody cried.

"Now there are two of you in the world, Father Kévi," said the shoemaker.

"And when you're finished they'll hang you," said the village policeman.

In the end the old man couldn't resist any longer, but got out of his chair and trotted up to look at his picture. He shook his head.

"Am I like that?" he said jovially. "Yes, that's just like me!"

"Oh, it's not quite finished yet," replied the painter. "I'll come back again tomorrow. By that time you will have dried, and then I will put on the bitumen."

"What will you put on?"

"Well, then the tar—I will touch you up here and there with some tar."

"Me?"

"No, not you, of course, but your shadow, so that your eyes have more depth in them, Father Kévi."

Out in the street the little Bozitsy woman was on tenter-hooks.

"Upon my soul, Mr. Painter," she ventured, when we had reached the bridge.

And as we stopped she clasped her hands anxiously:

"I ask you very humbly, Sir, and dear picture maker," she said "if you could—my little girl—my little Helene . . ."

"I don't know if I shall have the time," replied the painter. "Which is your little girl?"

"She is dead, my poor darling—she is dead!" said the woman, her eyes bathed in tears.

"It was her only child," I told the painter, for the woman's voice was gone and she could no longer speak; "a pretty little thing with blue eyes."

"Yes, yes!" sobbed the woman.

"It would be very difficult," said the painter, shrugging his shoulders. "Have you a photograph of any kind?"

"Ah, no, Sir! That's exactly why I want her picture done."

As we went on to my house together, I told the painter that the little girl was not only dearly loved by her mother, but that she had been the nicest little fair girl with blue eyes in the village. She had died from croup, poor darling.

Then we went on to talk about other things. We spoke about shooting. This year we had lots of wild duck. In the evening, I said, I would take the painter with me and we would go out in a boat after duck.

The painter, however, did not want to go shooting. He stood gazing at the reeds in the evening light—the sunset in the reed beds. After a long silence, he said:

"Was that little girl very much like her mother?"

"If she had been grown up, she would have been exactly like her."

"Then I will try and do something," he said, good-temperedly. "I will paint that woman as though she were still seven years old."

"Would that be possible?" I asked.

"Why, yes! The hair will be fairer, the eyes larger and bluer. I will make the eyebrows thinner and higher. I will make the face rounder—or was the child thin?"

"My word, she was a kind of tiny little bird!"

"Oh, well, that won't matter. Her features should be fuller, anyway, the little chin less defined, the complexion white and transparent, and the little neck thin."

And on the following day he set to work to paint the portrait of the dead child.

The mother posed, full of zeal, without even knowing why. She only knew one thing—if she posed, she would have the portrait of her daughter.

It was very natural that she should pose!

When the portrait was finished, the painter improvised a frame, surrounded it with a bit of green drapery and we told the woman to come and see it.

The woman looked at the picture, and suddenly her tears began to fall.

"Do you recognise her?" I asked, much moved.

"How could I fail to recognise her, Mr. Schoolmaster?" she said; "but the poor darling has very much changed since she went to heaven."

GETTING ACQUAINTED

By GEZA GARDONY

ON the evening of St. Michael's Day I was coming home from the fair. I was alone in the cart. Martin Nagy was driving. It was windy, therefore we did not talk. The cart rattled and grated as it went. The evening grew darker and darker.

These journeys at night give one the impression of being in a fairy tale. You don't know where you are, and all you can see is that everything is dark in front of you and behind you. In this black world there are black trees. They stand lined up like formless giants, and when the wind moves them they lean over and bow to you, and shake their heads.

Suddenly a red eye appeared in the distance, out of the darkness; then there were two, then three, and always more. We had reached a village. Here and there we heard barking; then a dog ran out in front of the horse. For some time he indulged in a furious dance, barking in front of the horse; then he allowed the cart to pass, in order to be able to bark at the rear wheels also.

After a few minutes we again plunged into the silent dark; only the red fiery eyes followed us for a little time longer.

In the middle of a village we overtook another vehicle. It was a peasant's cart, like ours. Some big, angular thing was loaded up behind it. It was so dark we could not see what it was, or whether it was a dealer coming back from the fair or even some peasants bringing home some furniture.

In passing through the village, the road ran between two ditches, and as it was impossible to pass the vehicle in front of us, we had to follow at a walking pace behind it.

When we reached the end of the village, our driver called out:

"Is that you, Father Kadari?"

"Is that you, Marci?" responded an aged voice.

The man who replied was Imadsagos Kadari, an old pensioner of the war of 1848 (the war for Hungarian independence, which was known as the War of Liberty), who had received a bullet in the knee at the Battle of Pisk.

Now we knew that his son and his daughter-in-law were also in his cart. They had taken a calf to the fair, and with the money for which they had sold it they had bought a wardrobe.

They had a marriageable daughter in the house.

The old man had been to see the picture on the great altar. There was a good deal of talk about this picture in his village, because, if you will believe it, this picture represented a Christ who looked at all who prayed before Him. Whether one was at the right or the left of the picture, the Christ looked at you with living eyes. Since the picture had been placed on the altar, many people from the village had gone to confession there. It was for this purpose that the old man had gone there today. He had made his confession and communicated before the Christ with the living eyes.

"Hullo there!" shouted my driver, "will you make a little room there to let Mr. Schoolmaster pass?"

"Right ho!" replied young Kadari, "but we must get over the bridge first!"

And in a changed voice he added:

"I should like to wish you good evening!"

The bridge was an old plank bridge that stood at the end of the village. Even in daylight one had to walk over it with care.

Did the horses know the bridge was dangerous, or were they merely frightened with the noise of their own shoes? In any case, they ran away.

Kadari gave them a blow from his whip. One of his horses made a leap forward, while the other rose right up in the air, and we saw the big cart turning over sideways. A moment later it rolled over into the ditch, making a tremendous rattle.

This kind of accident is very amusing to read about, but it is much more alarming in reality. The woman cried out

in terror, the men swore. The horses floundered about. The waggon groaned and creaked.

My driver pulled on his reins, to prevent our horses from also taking fright. Then we both jumped down, and I struck two matches together, in order to see what had happened.

The wind prevented me.

"Go to the nearest house and ask for a lanthorn," I told my driver.

When the man had left, all three occupants of the overturned waggon pulled themselves out of the ditch.

"The wardrobe! Oh, my beautiful wardrobe!" moaned the woman. "We gave eleven florins for it! Are you hurt, Jean? You haven't hurt yourself, have you, Father? Oh, my beautiful, magnificent wardrobe!"

Kadari pulled at his horses' bridles and swore furiously.

"Don't swear!" growled the old man.

As the woman bewailed the fate of her wardrobe without ceasing, however, Kadari pulled more and more furiously at his reins and kept on swearing.

"Will you stop swearing like that?" shouted the old man, also letting an oath or two fall. "If you don't, I'll give you a good smack in the head! Did anybody ever see the like of it!"

And turning to myself, he added:

"If it is God's will that we should turn over, then it is the will of God!"

He made this statement with such a convinced air that when one heard him one would have thought the Lord of the Universe had nothing else to do all day than to upset the Kadari family on the bridge.

"The principal thing," I said, "is that you are not hurt."

A light now shone from the last house in the village, and shot a gleam of brightness across the night. Two men followed my driver. One of them wore a fur cap on his head, and the other a hat.

The lanthorn soon showed us the parapetless bridge, with some very high wild sorrel and all sorts of climbing plants growing about it, with the waggon lying on its side beside it. The ditch, fortunately, was only a yard deep.

The wardrobe was undamaged, only one of the doors having come open. But the shaft of the waggon was broken, and so was one of the wheels.

The man with the fur cap raised his lanthorn and threw a light on us.

Kadari was covered with mud. The bottom of the old man's *suba*—a sheepskin coat, the wool of which is worn on the inside in the winter and on the outside in the summer—was marked with blood. The woman had had the best luck of all, and had no mark of either mud or blood upon her. Nevertheless she had been the loudest to cry out.

The man in the fur cap turned his light on me also. I then saw that he was a dark-complexioned fellow of about fifty, with a Silurian head. The man in the hat, a fine, solid lad, was certainly his son. Both had little eyes and the air of being serious people.

"Well," said the man in the fur cap, raising his head, "you had better come to my place. The old man has lost a good deal of blood and the waggon is smashed. Come to my house and spend the night."

"The devil!" said Kadari, scratching his head. "Can't we tie our waggon on behind Mr. Schoolmaster's?"

"Willingly," said I, "so far as I am concerned, but what about the old man? He's hurt."

The old man stretched his arms and legs, and even raised his lame limb off the ground.

"There's nothing much the matter with me," he said.

"But look at your wheel," said the man in the fur cap, shaking his head. "Your waggon will fall all to pieces before you can get home!"

They first got the wardrobe out of the ditch, and then the waggon. I went along with them to the peasant's house. I wanted to see how the old man was hurt.

The road to the house was in a bad state, and we walked along cautiously and in silence. The only sound was the noise made by the broken shaft, as it dragged along the ground, between the two horses.

Old Kadari must have stumbled against a lump of earth, for he just saved himself from falling; then he continued to limp along in the midst of us.

Suddenly he stopped, his eyes fixed in front of him.

"God of Mercy!" he murmured, in astonishment.

He started on again, took a few steps, and stopped again.

"God of Mercy!" he said once more, while his voice trembled.

"What's the matter, Father Kadari."

"My leg's giving away!"

"What, the lame one?"

"Yes." He continued, nevertheless, to limp along.

On arriving at the house, the horses were put into the stable, and the waggon and the wardrobe into the barn. Then we all met in the living room of the house. A smell of fur and cooked potatoes pervaded the place. We made old Kadari sit down on a chair, and his son took off his boots.

The old man's knee proved to have been injured.

"Is there a doctor in the village?" I asked the strangers.

"A doctor? No; but our cowkeeper understands everything," said the man in the fur cap.

"There's no need to trouble him!" I remarked sharply.

The family with the Silurian heads stared at me. Their look plainly said: "It's pretty evident you don't live in this village!"

"Give me some clean water and some clean rag!"

"There is some warm water," said the mistress of the house, a thin woman with white hair and a chronic cough. On reaching the door she turned and said:

"Our minister is a healer, too!"

"Then we had better send for the minister!"

While the young man went to fetch the minister who was also a doctor, the head of the family asked us to sit down and asked us where we came from.

We told him.

"And in whose house are we?" I asked him in my turn.

"My name is Etienne Soos," he replied, pulling out his pipe; and seating himself near the table, he added proudly: "I am a juryman!"

"And so am I!" asserted Kadari, also taking out his pipe.

They both lighted their pipes, with a friendly look at each other.

"Aren't we giving you a great deal of trouble?" questioned Kadari's wife, timidly.

"No," said Etienne Soos; "in the first house there are a couple of beds and a couch."

He puffed once or twice, and then continued:

"When we have done what we can for your father, we will go into the other house."

"Is that your only son?" asked the woman.

"Yes, the only son."

"He's a fine, well set up young man!"

"A fine, strong lad!" said Kadari, approvingly.

The eyes of Etienne Soos shone with pleasure. He sucked at his pipe still more strongly, and remarked, modestly:

"Yes, thank God!"

And smilingly he added:

"A sack of wheat to him weighs not more than a pound to another!"

The village clergyman arrived. He was a young man, taciturn and pale. He looked at the injured knee, and poured some water on it.

"Don't be alarmed!" he said kindly. "It's not going to kill you!"

Complete silence reigned in the room. All that was heard was the water dripping on the floor. Then Etienne Soos sat down again and said in a low tone to Kadari:

"The other day he lifted a sack weighing four hundred and fifty pounds on his shoulder!"

Kadari's wife held a candle to give the doctor-minister light.

The clergyman, seated on a stool, poured out more water, and from time to time looked at the wound closely.

"Bring the light closer!" he said suddenly.

And between his teeth he murmured:

"What in the world can this be?"

He drew something resembling a button from the wound, and held it up to the light to see what it was.

"That?" said the old man with astonishment. "Why that is the bullet that was fired at me!"

And in a voice trembling with joy he added:

"It was the Christ with the living eyes that upset us!"

II

On Advent Sunday, after the litany, old Kadari, wrapped in his *suda* down to his feet, came towards me. He still limped, although he could walk without lameness if he wanted to, but he had become so accustomed to limping that he preferred to continue it.

"What news, Father Kadari?"

"Well, a week ago the Soos came to see us—Etienne and his wife. Because I must tell you that when we made their acquaintance, they promised to come and taste our new wine. So they came, and they also saw the vines. We have become still better friends, and they have got to be very fond of our little girl. And while we were talking, Etienne's wife said that it was a wife like that that her son wanted. And we said to her that we only wished God would give her a man like their lad!"

"My word, but they would make a fine pair!"

"Well, the lad has come today with his father, and if the two young people like each other, perhaps we shall celebrate their betrothal immediately."

"So soon as that?"

"Why not? The young man lives a long way off; and then, if they look at each other three times, they won't see any more than if they looked at each other only once!"

In the Hungarian villages these hasty betrothals are by no means rare. Love is born at first sight, and flowers afterwards. The principal factor in this case was that Tiennot Soos was an only child, and Juliette Kadari was an only daughter. There were thirty acres of land on each side, which would make sixty after the death of the parents.

The Kadari family asked me to have supper with them, and I went.

The young girl had been one of my pupils. She was still attending the Sunday School last year. She was my best pupil in arithmetic, and she also wrote a very good hand. She was very fond of embellishing her capital letters with all sorts of flourishes. Her father said to me one day:

"If she only wore trousers, she might be a lawyer!"

It was an icy winter evening, with a cold wind. There

was a strange vehicle in the yard, and a glow of firelight under the door. The dog was sitting in front of the kitchen door, with his ears erect and his eyes shining. Naturally, he was looking towards the inside of the kitchen.

Juliette gracefully opened the door to me. She had learnt that from me. If she had not gone to school, she would have left me to find the door-string by myself.

"What a colour you have, and how nice you look!"

"That is because of the fire, Mr. Schoolmaster!"

"Of course it is because of the fire!"

It was a great family feast day. On the table, covered with a white cloth, an oil lamp was alight. Round it were seated some men dressed in blue, with wine and cigars in front of them. The young man alone was smoking a cigar; the others preferred their nose-warmers.

The room was cleared of smoke in my honour, then I lighted my own pipe, which was a long one, and we began to chat.

Our conversation was only peasants' talk, to be sure: the weather, the harvest, the repairing of the roads, the taxes, the bridges, the new village parson, the elections, and lots of other things also.

The lover took no part in the conversation. He sat against the wall. On ordinary occasions his place would be on the outer side of the table, but today his eyes have plenty to do. Between the table and the door, that tiny stretch of space. . . . On this little piece of ground his whole future life was going to be settled today!

Therefore he smoked his cigar; he smoked it and resmoked it, and his mouth took on a stupid expression, the look of a child at its mother's breast. His little brown eyes were turned constantly towards the young girl, every time that she entered and gracefully crossed the room.

That light and undulating movement, that coquettish poising of the red skirt—no countess was capable of imitating that!

Nobody, however, had educated these common people in things of that kind. . . . An unwritten philosophy, nevertheless, had; a philosophy which informed the peasant better than all the schools and all the catechisms.

That unwritten philosophy sang in the ear of the lover:

“Don’t marry the girl for her golden hair,
For her kitchen things of copper or for her
’broidered robes,

But love her rather for her goodness,

And for the graceful way in which she walks.”

For, upon my word, the graceful walk of a young girl, her blushing cheeks, her modestly lowered eyes, enable one to judge of many things!

The manner in which she carries a dish, places it on the table, offers it to the guests; the carriage of her head, the movements of her hands, her kindly amiability—all this counts.

The young girl knows well, also, that such hours as these mark a very important moment in her life. Throughout the whole evening she comes and goes, blushing up to her ears. Her eyes are always lowered when she brings in a dish. And it is only by a miracle of God that she is able to see her way even to the table.

She has never been sufficiently beautiful to paint. She has a rounder face than any Venus. Her lips are thicker than those of the other peasants.

In spite of all this, she is beautiful today. What makes her lovely this evening are her radiant eyes, her embarrassment overflowing with happiness, her hurried little steps, the lightness of her movements, her watchful care. And when all is summed up, it is these plump and kissable faces that the peasants like the best.

The person who was most delighted with her, however, was undoubtedly the lad himself. He gazed at the young girl, while twisting his budding moustache, and every time she said:

“Will you please serve yourself?” he was ready to eat even sawdust, if she had placed it before him.

I addressed a few words to Tiennot. (I called him Tiennot, and his father Etienne, as these were the names they used between themselves):

“Tell me, Tiennot—have you many fruit trees?”

“We? You may be sure we have!” proudly replied the lad, “and we planted some more last year.”

"Have you yet served your time in the army?"

He looked rather embarrassed, and his father replied for him:

"You see, he is an only son, consequently he is exempted."

"Thank God!" ejaculated Kadari, with a nod of his head.

All these questions were apparently of no importance, yet each opened a little door, and each reply opened up a picture of the future.

For these poor, simple people stand with trembling hearts, like the intelligent rich, before the veil of the future. For parents, be they rich or be they poor, their own child is always their hearts' idol. Their whole thought is concentrated on him, and when the time comes for him to choose a wife, or for them to select a husband for their daughter, the pearls of hope begin to be engendered in their souls, midway between joy and anxiety.

Here, in the villages, the young people do not become acquainted at dances and evening parties and five o'clock teas, or at the watering places. Nobody has ever heard of "The Moonlight Sonata," and when a young girl blushes, she has no ostrich feather fan behind which to hide her face, but buries it in her apron. It is the ruddy tint of the peach that makes it beautiful!

What a life of hard labour awaits them! When I look on this frail young girl, still a child only yesterday, I cannot help thinking of pretty Madeleine Szabo. Madeleine is sixteen and already a mother.

Perhaps in twelve-months time this young girl will also have a child in her arms, and the first marks of care will have begun to appear on her pure and smooth forehead.

Then I look upon this lad of twenty with the broad shoulders who, intoxicated with gazing on the girl, is looking at everything through rose-coloured glasses, through which he sees only one thing: a future companion to whom, in a few weeks, he will be "Etienne," like his father. The human lot is filled with good things, but what a price they cost! Bread does not grow upon trees, as in fortunate Africa. In this country it has to be got by tilling the soil, by harrowing, mowing and threshing. Each slice of bread

represents so much human sweat, and when one has secured it, one has to break it into two and give one-half to the tax collector. And later on, when there are seven or eight little beaks screaming in the nest? Then is the time when the parent birds have to get up with the dawn, and go to bed with all tomorrow's cares in front of them. Provided that the woman is honest, industrious, cleanly and good tempered, however, our people are so hardened to labour that it is impossible for them to imagine the world can be otherwise.

We smoked and talked round the table. Notwithstanding all that was said, the word "marriage" had not yet been pronounced, as if these people had not even come for such a purpose. And if it so happened that they went away without mentioning such a subject, well, nobody would ever whisper a word about it. The young people did not please each other, that would be all. Such an eventuality would not prevent the Kadaris from saying how d'y'e do to the Soos, every time they met them at the fair, or the Soos from going to see the Kadaris. They would remain good friends, and perhaps the youngsters of their third or fourth generations would meet and take a fancy to each other.

Supper once over, Etienne Soos put the question: why had not the pretty little rose of the house come to table with the rest?

"On such occasions," said the girl's mother, with her eyes full of joy, "her place is in the kitchen."

She went, all the same, to fetch her daughter, and gently pushed her into the living room.

And it is really surprising that young girls should make a habit of working in the kitchen in their holiday clothes: pretty white chemise with sleeves, blue silk fichu, necklace of clear glass beads, and ribbons plaited into the hair!

Blushing all over, she seated herself in front of the young man, but buried her face in her hands.

A moment afterwards she rose and ran out of the room. She must have hidden herself in the larder, or at least in the inner room. Nobody would be able to get her out again, not even with a rope.

A few minutes later the Soos left the living room "to see how the horses were getting on."

A brief silence followed their departure. Kadari pulled hard at his pipe, and looked at me.

"Well," I said, cautiously, "he looks to me to be a very good lad. He is strong, well set up, and fitted for hard work, and so far as I can see they are a very good sort of people."

"Very good people," said old Kadari, between his teeth.

"We saw their land when Father was ill there," said the girl's father. "It is good land, very rich. If ours was like it, it would be worth twice as much."

"I only wish it was not so far away!" sighed the mother, as she wiped away a tear.

"But do you think the lad is pleased with her?" asked Kadari.

This doubt was addressed to me. Kadari knew very well that his daughter had pleased. Nothing could be more certain, but certitude is truly certain only when other people affirm its certainty.

The two Soos returned. The father knocked at the door first, and a few instants later, the boy.

The father filled his pipe and while doing this looked us each over in turn.

Every face bore an imprint of amiable benevolence.

Seeing this, Etienne Soos gave a preliminary cough, to clear his throat, and then, holding his smoking pipe between his fingers, he began:

"Well, now, it's getting late, and we have a long way to go."

"Oh, oh," said the host.

"Why, the train hasn't whistled yet!" added the old man gaily.

"Well," said Etienne, with formal gravity, "having made the acquaintance of this honourable family, I have brought my son to see them."

"And you did well!" said the Kadaris simultaneously.

"Very well, then; now I ask you if you have anything to say against my son?"

And he looked around him.

"He's a very good boy!" said the Kadaris. "May God give you a long life, Tiennot!"

And they drank with him.

Etienne Soos did not drink. While they drank the health of his son, he puffed slowly at his pipe.

"What we came for," said Etienne Soos, in a softer voice, "was that . . . seeing that the first man in Paradise was likewise . . ."

And he continued with the customary comparison, which was listened to with great attention. Even the flame of the lamp appeared to grow larger, as if for to listen also. And the flame rose with a jump when Etienne Soos, starting from Paradise, reached the house of the Kadaris and found in it the admirable girl who in baptism had received the name of Julie.

In the course of two visits the parents had already made each other's acquaintance, and now it was the turn of the young people to declare themselves. Everybody in the house was certain they were pleased with each other. The manner in which the girl had invited the boy to help himself from each dish, and the fact that he had accepted each time and had eaten almost alarming quantities, was regarded as extremely significant.

I went to look for the girl and I drew her out from the other room, where she was sitting on a coffer and waiting amid God knows what thoughts and what sentiments.

"Now, have courage!" I said, in real schoolmaster's tones. "Don't let them think you are a good for nothing. You alone have more brains of your own than the whole village where they live. Courage, then, my girl!"

With this I made her enter the other room.

"Well, Juliette," I said to her, formally, "you have a suitor, in the person of this good lad here!"

Juliette dropped her eyes, and I believe she would have liked to sink into the earth.

Once in the living room, she had lost all her courage!

I held her firmly by the arm, however, so that she could neither sink into the ground nor hide herself in her mother's arms.

"I am quite aware," I said, "that you are too embarrassed to be able to speak, but you must not forget that our dear friends live a long way off and that they cannot wait for

your reply. If this young man has touched your heart, therefore, and you are willing to say that you accept the choice he has made, hold out your right hand."

Juliette timidly raised her head and looked at the lad. The latter was as red as a lobster. Then she lowered her eyes again and held her hand towards the boy.

It was already nine o'clock, and the happy parents had a heap of things to talk over together.

In the midst of handshakes and benedictions, the young man gave the girl a ring, and she gave him a silk handkerchief.

Then we took them into the inner room, in order that they might become acquainted with each other, while their parents talked.

"Tell me, Juliette," I said to the young girl on the following day; "you have always been intelligent and frank. Tell me what you said to each other last night!"

She blushed, smiled and looked embarrassed.

"Nothing."

"Is that how you reply to your schoolmaster?"

"But, really, we did not say anything, Mr. Schoolmaster!"

"And when you were left by yourselves, what happened first?"

"I sat on the coffer, and what's his name on the chair."

"And then . . ."

"And as I was terribly ashamed of myself, I hid my face in my hands. Because the candle shone too much in my eyes. I waited for him to say something, then I should have replied."

"He must have thought you were crying."

"He couldn't have thought so, for afterwards I took away my hands. I was sitting so that he couldn't help seeing me, and he could very well see I wasn't crying!"

"And he said nothing?"

"No."

"What was he doing all the time?"

"He was sitting on the chair. Once I looked up at him, and I saw that he was as red in the face as myself and that his eyes were fixed on his boots!"

THE ILLUSION

By VIRGILIO BROCCHI

THE short, stout and bald-headed director general sat with his grumpy face bent over the desk; he made no sign of greeting, he did not move his neck nor turn around when the usher introduced Professor Vantori. On the contrary, he kept on writing as indifferently as if no one had come into the office. The young man remained standing a few moments beside the writing table, his folded overcoat on his arm and his hat in his hand; then he sat down, straightened the sharp crease in his trousers, at the knees, and placed one handsome patent leather shoe beside the other, and waited.

Commander Rifratta lifted his eyes from his papers to ask half bluntly and half jokingly:

"What is it you want?"

Perfectly at ease, in exactly the right tone, the professor replied, "I would like to wait until you have time to hear me."

The director general put down his pen but cast a glance at the clock.

"Go ahead. Your name?"

"Enrico Vantori."

"Instructor in . . ."

"Letters, at the Lyceum of Modica, Sicily. As substitute."

"And you would like?"

"To leave Modica forever."

"Modica doesn't agree with you?"

"Indeed not. I almost died there last summer. And to die from inflammation of the intestines when you've come back alive from the trenches . . ."

The director general shrugged his shoulders lightly and made a grimace.

"My brother really died in Sicily."

Vantori did not know it, but he replied, "So I have heard.

And that is just why I thought you would probably understand my position. I thought you would at least give me a bit of advice."

"The only advice I can give you is to go back to your post at once, if you're not off on regular leave. Go back there and prepare a good thesis . . ."

"At Modica?"

"A good thesis can be prepared anywhere, provided one has enough will power and intelligence. Then try to qualify in the competitive examinations next year, for one of the first posts, and I will have the honour . . . of transferring you to Rome!"

"But couldn't you, in the meantime, entrust me with a little . . . mission?"

The commander replied jokingly: "It isn't my fault if, according to the juridical status imposed on the ministry by the teacher's federation . . . my hands are tied . . . as they demanded . . ."

"But before planning to pass new examinations, couldn't I find out what the result of this year's competition is? Please excuse me. But when one has lived four years in the trenches and another in Modica, one gets a sort of fancy for the world. If, for instance, I had passed this last competition fairly well and won a good place on the list, it would seem rather extravagant for me to go way down to the other end of Italy, traveling for more than two days by train, only to have to come back again, the same way, in a few weeks."

The director replied irritably:

"And in the meantime am I to take charge of the examinations at Modica? You teachers never think of anything but your own interest. Besides, I don't think it's a matter of a few weeks, only. Tens and tens of commissions have to sit, the lyceum commissions, the institute commissions, the normal school commissions, the high school commissions! And there are all sorts of tests, examinations, and competitions, special examinations, general examinations, and thousands and thousands of candidates, and yet this unfortunate ministry is blamed if every empty post is not filled in time! Why, I've bushels of names of candidates and graduates!"

"You wouldn't be so kind as to let me know where my name is?"

"No, I can't show you the list of the successful candidates before His Excellency, the Minister of Public Instruction has seen it. Besides, even if your name were on the list it wouldn't mean anything. You know the Upper Council may discover some irregularity, and make the Minister declare the whole competition null and void. What's your name?"

"Enrico Vantori."

"And you passed the examinations for instructorship in the high schools?"

"Yes, sir."

The commander selected a pile of folders, took one out and placed it on the table. He opened the green cover, looked through the papers, and gazed at a list of names, pointing to the first ones with a red pencil, and going slowly down the list as if he were verifying a column of figures. Suddenly he stopped, closed the folder sharply, and said: "And anyway, if His Excellency does not go over the report very soon it will be too late, and nothing will be done this year. However, I'll make a note of it."

Professor Vantori thought he had seen his name as seventh or eighth on the list, and he was bubbling over with delight; but suddenly his face grew long. The director general was tracing a few words rapidly with the blue end of his pencil. He grew alarmed because the usher, to whom he had given a good tip, had told him, among a lot of other things, that Commander Rifratta only paid attention to notes scribbled in red. Everything else found its way to the waste basket. Therefore, in a voice which made the impertinence seem cleverly witty and veiled with respect, he said:

"Since you are so kind, Commander, won't you turn the pencil around! Red stands out so much better, you know!"

The director looked at him sidewise. A suspicion that the play of the two colours had in some way leaked out beyond his own solitary mind gleamed between the eyelids, but it faded at once in the face of the ingenuous features of Professor Vantori. The director smiled, and tracing a

red line under the blue words, he added, in a less crabbed voice:

"Are you happy now?"

And then as if immediately regretting that he had been obliging, he growled:

"But don't go building any castles in Spain. If His Excellency doesn't sign the decree now, everything will be postponed till next year."

And he rose and showed the professor out.

Once out of compass, in the dark waiting room, Professor Vantori kicked his heels nervously together and straightened up, thinking:

"Even if I have to storm the ministry or throw a hand grenade into the high school, no power on earth can make me stay at Modica."

The elderly usher with the bristling beard and the stained and soiled coat, the one to whom he had given the ten-lire tip a moment before, came up and put his hand on the silk lining of the coat the professor carried on his arm.

"How did things go? Did the commander make a note of your request? In red?"

"No, blue. But he underlined it in red."

And Vantori looked at the usher as if asking what he made out of it.

The usher stuck his lips out, shrugged his shoulders.

"Who knows."

The waiting room was filled with men and women teachers, with threadbare cuffs, dubious looking collars, shining and nervous knees, agitated handbags and glasses, deformed hats dancing on untidy hair. Professor Vantori seemed an affectation of elegance in such clumsy poverty; he motioned to the usher to follow him and when they had passed down through the glass-covered hall to the top of the stairs, he handed him another ten-lire bill, and said:

"Listen. Every time you find in the commander's waste basket a list with my name on it—Enrico Vantori—you put it back on his desk."

"You can count on me—I'll slip it in among the red notes. You can rely on me as safely as in your mother's lap."

"And now please show me the way to the minister."

"Have you a letter of introduction from a deputy?"

"No."

"Nor from a fine lady?"

"No."

"Then, my boy, trust in God!"

It took him a quarter of an hour. But after having passed through a labyrinth of corridors and passed up and down a maze of foul-looking stairs, the professor finally arrived at the minister's waiting room. He walked brazenly up to the usher who was standing at the end of the crimson divan, and said, looking him straight in the eye:

"Has His Excellency come in yet?"

"Yes, Signor Commendatore!"

"Is he busy?"

"He's conferring with the head of the cabinet."

"Commander Bercore!"

"Yes, sir. And I've just announced the Honorable Barazoni, the deputy. He's in there, with the minister's private secretary."

"Very well. Announce me, please,"—and accepting the title the usher had credited him with . . . "Commander Vantori." And he handed over a card.

The usher took the card, but did not look at it. Instead he looked attentively at the handsome gentleman with the decoration on his breast, tall, well dressed, young and marked by a row of white hairs in the midst of the coal-black mane combed straight back, and replied:

"Please be seated, *Signor Commendatore*."

Vantori sat down on the crimson sofa and reflected that it was much easier to be received by a minister than by the head of a department, and then suddenly he thought of something else: Doretta must be getting impatient, waiting for him down there, in the church of Santa Maria della Minerva.

"She'll excuse me when I tell her what happened. I'll win her forgiveness by a little present—a parasol or a bag. But I won't go back to Modica even if I have to spend every cent of the few thousand I saved up, in the trenches!

I must have been crazy!" he went on, in his mind, "a fine career, that of high school instructor! I haven't risked my life every day for four years just to earn six hundred lire a month!"

He closed his eyes and his pupils filled with a mass of rays and incandescent gold beams; he wanted to live, enjoy life, get on in the world. He wanted to fight, but in journalism, in politics; he wanted to become deputy, rise to power, become minister. His heart beat hard, and in his mind's eye he saw himself minister, with all this servile and haughty personnel at his feet. He was already signing a decree discharging that idiot with the red and blue pencil who condemned people to die of impatience in Modica, when he heard His Excellency's door open. He turned around. The door was open but in the opening hung a velvet portière which prevented him from looking in, although it enabled him to hear a laughing voice say in broad Neapolitan dialect:

"That's right, Bercore! Give us some air! In Rome it's as stifling in October as in July! Give me my own country!"

There came the sound of a hand striking on the table and the same laughing voice continued:

"And how late do you think, Bercore, I was signing papers last night? Till three minutes of two. Now tell me. If I hadn't had a room fixed up over there, with a bed to sleep on, where and how long would I have slept?"

"You wouldn't have slept, Excellency," replied another joking voice. "We're used to giving up everything, by this time."

"Right! No more food, no more books, no more walks, no more . . . I tell you, Bercore, this is a eunuch's job!"

"You've said it, Excellency!"

"And as we're not eunuchs, without saying anything to His Majesty, nor to the most estimable President of the Council, I'll take you by the arm one day and we'll go off to Sardinia. Or rather, I'll go alone, and forget that I'm a university professor, a deputy and a minister. I'll go hunting every day, fishing every day, and I'll have a new girl every day!"

"Excellency!" the other voice interrupted with feigned severity. "Every day? I don't believe it!"

"Nor do I," cried the good-natured voice, with a great resounding of open hands on the writing table. "But if not, we might as well stay here, at the ministry. Be an angel, Bercore, and send in that most charming Barazzoni."

And there came a quick step toward the door, a clever face seemed to perforate the hangings, and the jocund voice of His Excellency dropped the Neapolitan music to drawl in the dialect of Piedmont:

"Let him come in, the custodian of the beautiful girls!"

He went towards the sofa, but when he saw the stranger with the ribbon on his breast jump to his feet, he said, half respectfully and half jokingly:

"Don't try to make me believe that *you're* the honorable Barazzoni! You have the medallion on your breast, instead of on a chain, like a deputy! So much the better. Wait a quarter of an hour or so, and I'll see you."

He turned toward his friend, the deputy, who emerged from the private secretary's office, and greeted him, half aggressively, half affectionately.

"Ah, my dear Barazzoni! What a beautiful woman! If that beautiful creature had only sent me her picture, instead of a pile of documents, I would have had her transferred to Rome! And you made her send me a memorandum!"

The head of the cabinet stepped aside for them to pass, and then he closed the door behind them, crossing the room quickly as he went out, on tip toe, like a chambermaid.

"A quarter of an hour," thought Vantori. "Doretta will go wild."

His eyes shone with a sudden idea. He hesitated a moment and then turned to the usher.

"My wife is downstairs, waiting for me. I'll just run down and speak to her a moment and come right back. Please ask the minister to excuse me, if he sends for me."

He made the corridor, rushed down the stairs, crossed the square and plunged into the darkness of the church.

Doretta was really getting angry. She had sat down for a while, and then she had been kneeling, for a while,

then she had made a tour of the chapels, bringing her parasol down with a jerk on the stone floor, and now, before the grill work before the main altar, she moved softly on the tips of her toes like a bird about to break into flight. Every moment or so she lifted her wrist to glance at the watch clasped over the glove, saying to herself that she would go as soon as another five minutes had passed.

The sexton was watching her. Seeing how young, how pretty, how well dressed she was from her smart hat strung with roses, to the hem of the skirt drawn tightly around her figure, with the handbag of embroidered green velvet dangling by long ribbons from her arm, he realised, without much effort, that she was waiting for an admirer. He watched her flit from one dark spot to another, ready to interfere—he didn't know exactly whether in order to get a tip, or to defend the inviolability of his temple.

She turned around suddenly at the sound of Enrico's footstep and there was lightning in her dark eyes as she held out her wrist watch:

"With you, two quarters of an hour mean four."

"Doretta of my heart, my beautiful Doretta, don't be angry. You're too pretty to be cruel."

She was, as a matter of fact, lovely. The whole little figure rose, exquisitely bold from the ankles to the well formed shoulders, the soft gown clung to her so closely that it seemed to model the nude bust and hips, and the eyes radiated in the tanned face where the mouth blossomed full and red over the splendor of her teeth.

"I need you. Help me, Doretta precious. What more do you want?"

At the sound of Enrico's imploring tone the beautiful features grew tender and the eyes softened.

The guardian's coat emerged from the darkness and approached, airily, but the professor did not heed it. He caught Doretta's arm and murmured, trembling with impatience:

"If you'll help me escape from Modica I'll give you . . ."

As no tip was forthcoming, the sexton realised that he had been impelled to guard the sanctity of the church, only. And he raised his scowling face to growl:

"We're not in the Thermes of Carcalla!"

Vantori glared at him as one glares at a mad dog before kicking it in the teeth, but he lowered his voice and taking Doretta by the arm, he dragged her out so quickly that he almost lifted her off the ground.

Doretta was thrilled, listening to Enrico's words, and together they flew across the square, through the labyrinth of the ministry, passed through the corridors, reveling in the sensation of being devoured by the stern glances of the ushers.

They stopped for a moment outside the minister's ante-room.

Lifting up the velvet portière, His Excellency, Raffaele Berovini, was standing at the door of his office, talking to the Honorable Barazzoni, saying to him in Piedmont dialect:

"And as a favor, tell your colleagues in the parliament to take my minister's job away from me so we can go hunting together! So long, Barazzoni!"

"Barazzoni!" Doretta exclaimed, awed, with an instinctive glance behind her. But seeing that the deputy was peering into the dark as if to recognise her, she took the bull by the horns and went up to him.

"Honorable Barazzoni, allow me to introduce my husband, Captain Vantori! Please present him to His Excellency!"

With a brusque cordiality that had something soldierlike about it, the deputy, tall and handsome, stretched out his hand, saying, "I see one has to come to Berovini's cabinet to meet one's pretty friends!"

And, as if to explain the situation to Doretta's husband, he added:

"I had the pleasure of meeting the *signora* at Udine, during a tour of the front."

Looking him squarely in the face, almost impudently, Vantori replied:

"I, too, met her in Udine, when I was going back to the front for the fourth time, after a leave."

The minister listened courteously to the introduction, saying:

"Please come this way, *Signora*." And with his hand he waved a greeting to the honorable Barazzoni.

"And so," His Excellency said gallantly, motioning to Doretta to be seated, "you're a teacher at . . ."

She sat down, placed her feet carefully on the carpet in front of her, pulled her skirt down, laughing:

"No! My husband is the professor!"

"Oh," said the minister. And for a moment he was really a minister, solemn, impenetrable, absent minded, and a bit annoyed at having allowed himself to be caught by a petitioner. But he looked again at Doretta, and Doretta was so pretty, so fresh, so lovely, that he smiled, and his open, beardless face seemed to radiate under the short, barely white tipped hair.

"He's still handsome," she thought, "and much more fascinating than a young man."

"And your husband would like . . ."

Vantori explained what he wanted. He saw very well that His Excellency wasn't listening, but he didn't care, and he tried to talk on without getting annoyed because he saw that the minister's attention was centered entirely on Doretta.

"I understand," His Excellency said after a while, "such a beautiful wife, in an out of the way village in Sicily . . . I understand, I understand. . . . Beauty without a temple, charm and elegance without priests . . . but beauty and charm flower for their own sake, like roses in the fields—even in the desert—and you, lucky egotist, have them all to yourself." And he sighed.

Vantori went on talking while the minister looked at Doretta, smiling as if he were, tacitly, carrying on with her a conversation which had nothing to do with what the professor was talking about. Finally she grew so embarrassed that she cast her eyes down to the tips of her shoes, and she kept them lowered for a long time, and then she suddenly raised them and met the minister's eyes with a smile.

And then His Excellency lost his breath and caressing his chin he smiled at the professor as he stumbled into an indifferent phrase:

"In other words, I gather that rather than return to Modica you would be satisfied with a charge . . ."

"There are no more charges, Excellency," Vantori remarked.

"You're quite right, the word doesn't exist, but the thing itself does. It is called a mission, now-a-days. And you," he laughed, "you wouldn't mind being sent on a mission . . . to Rome, with your wife?"

"Oh, I don't ask for as much as that! I would be satisfied with,"—his eyes shone, "a town where I could work and get ahead. I have to earn some money and get on, for my own sake . . . and for my wife's."

"A brave man is always ambitious. The trouble is, however, my dear Professor, as you certainly know, that for me to call someone to Rome when a long list of graduates is waiting, would be scandalous."

"I know it. And I wouldn't dare ask for any favours. I remarked a moment ago, Excellency, that I have reason to believe that I have won a good place, on the list of the candidates for the high school instructorships. I've seen Commander Rifratta, and if Your Excellency would take up the report at once, that is all that is necessary and my wife and I would be spared a long and painful journey."

The minister dominated the short impatience which ran down his spinal column to his heels, and replied:

"You're in a hurry, in a great hurry."

"And I, too," Doretta said with her large, sad eyes.

"You're in a hurry, too! Well, I wish I could fix things for you. I can't tell you how happy I would be if I could do so right away. But if I were to ask Commander Rifratta for the list of graduates, now, he would think the Cabinet is trying to force the hand of the Department—and then we would all be lost—both you and I! You can't imagine the amount of tact one must have to handle the bureaucracy. In democracies we still have omnipotent and irresponsible kings—they are the directors general in every ministry. We mustn't stir up their suspicions!" He smiled, and continued, "Take my advice. Don't be impatient." But catching sight of Doretta's imploring eyes, he started as if an unexpected idea had suddenly struck him, and with the air of a man who agrees to do a thing without exactly promising it in words, he said:

"There is nothing to do now. Even though the Upper Council were called immediately, a week, at the very least, would be necessary. Therefore, you go back there, but spare your wife the trip. I will do all I can to rush the report through, and to sign it, and in four or five days your wife can come back and get your transfer decree."

Husband and wife had long faces. The minister again caressed his smooth chin and smiled:

If five days seem too long, if the *signora* is afraid that I'll forget about you—today is Monday—let her come back Thursday afternoon, I hope to be able to give her a bit of good news. Are you happy now? Then we'll see where there's a suitable vacancy. Is that all right? You don't mind staying alone in Rome?"

"Oh no, I have an aunt here. I'll ask her to let me stay with her."

"Well in that case,"—His Excellency laughed. And confidentially, without reverence for the ribbon shining on the professor's breast, he threatened Vantori with his finger. "Jealous? Jealous of . . . Rome? No? Really not? If one has a jealous temperament one mustn't marry such a pretty girl!"

"She isn't only pretty," the captain corrected, severely.

"I know," said the minister. "One can see by her eyes that she has all the virtues! Till Thursday, *Signora*."

He rose, and as he drew near the door, he added negligently, "I wish you a good trip, Professor."

"To Modica?" Enrico Vantori said to himself, half furious and half delighted. "Bet your life not, you old satyr!" And the door closed.

The minister let the curtain fall and stepped back. He raised himself on his toes and peered into the looking glass, regretfully, and sighed:

"What a beautiful girl!"

He pressed the button and cried to the usher:

"Call Commander Rifratta!"

Thursday, at five, the usher received her at the threshold of the anteroom, with a pleasant smile.

"His Excellency is expecting you. I don't have to announce you. Take a seat, please."

The minister jumped up from his chair and came around the writing table to greet her, not smiling now, but with serious eyes almost stern with concentrated admiration. He said, seizing her hands:

"And what is the name of this apparition of light?" And as she did not understand, he added, "Lucia? Mary full of Grace?"

She smiled.

"Doretta."

"Doretta!" he exclaimed humbly, and saw her blush to the roots of her hair.

She had on a smaller hat, a longer skirt, carried a less fancy parasol, and she seemed both embarrassed and quivering—like a woman who, spurred on by morbid curiosity, had gone to the apartment of a Don Juan, and become suddenly frightened and eager to escape. She asked quickly, with tremulous lips:

"Were you able to do anything for my husband?"

"Of course." He smiled. "But sit down—only for a moment! I hope I don't frighten you!"

"I'm afraid of disturbing you. I know Your Excellency is always so busy."

"And that's just why it's so wonderful when a call from a lovely lady like you gives me the pretext of a five minutes' rest. Please sit down, *Signora* Doretta!"

She sat down on the edge of the sofa hesitatingly, as if ready to jump to her feet at any moment, and asked:

"Have you already signed the decree? Is it ready?"

"How impatient you are! Are we in such a frightful, frightful hurry to meet this happy husband again? Are we so much in love that it's unbearable to be without him, even for a week, even in Rome?"

He said it in such a strange way that she broke into laughter, and then she suddenly stopped, mortified. She replied with lowered eyes:

"If you knew how worried he is, poor man!"

"Let us write him. Shall we wire that he needn't worry? You see the matter isn't as simple as you think it is. You can pull the director general's leg, but you mustn't let him suspect it. That's why, Doretta . . . don't be angry . . .

give me your pretty little hand. . . . Do you know it seems to me I've known you for a long, long time. . . . I feel as if I were an old friend, a very good old friend who can't resign himself to not seeing you any more."

"It's queer, isn't it . . . but I feel, too, as if I had known you for a long time, and I'm surprised, sort of, at not knowing your first name."

"Raffaele."

"It's as if I'd always known it! And yet it's so strange, I can't tell you how strange it seems that you should be Your Excellency and at the same time a man like anybody else. Nicer, but just like anybody else. I have to make an effort to realise that you have Enrico's fate in your hands . . . I mean our fate. . . . Why are you laughing?"

"I'm not laughing, I'm smiling. Smiling, out of pity for myself . . . who am so powerful . . . so powerful, that I would give up my chair at the university, my position as deputy, minister . . . everything to . . . Enrico, . . . if I could have, in exchange, *magari*, even for a couple of weeks, the joy of being near you."

She laughed a bit awkwardly.

"And to think that when I heard people speak of 'His Excellency the Minister' I have always imagined him something like a sort of cardinal, with robes, and white beard and white hair . . ."

"As for the white hair!" he sighed.

"Nonsense. It doesn't show at all. One has to hunt to find it!"

"Please don't hunt! And say that it would make you just a little bit sorry, too, if you were never to come again and see your old friend at the ministry. I know it isn't true, but I'd like to hear you say so, just the same—please do!"

"But it *is* true!"

"And is it true that you will like me a little . . . just a wee little bit . . . if we do all we can for Enrico?"

That reminded her, too, of Enrico, and she said:

"But you will do something for him, won't you? Why I thought I'd find the decree already signed. I even hoped

to be able to send it to him at once . . . to . . . well, down there . . ."

"Doretta, Doretta, don't you know that a decree has to pass through fifty offices before it receives the necessary sacraments? It's going through—isn't that enough? You want to see it? In that case, instead of sending it, I'll keep it here in my office and you shall come and get it . . . let us see . . . today is Thursday . . . Saturday afternoon. How far off Saturday seems! But how near, if it's to be the last time I see you! I was unable to transfer him to Rome."

"What a shame," she said absent-mindedly.

"For the time being he's appointed at Perugia. But before long I hope to be able to call him to Rome, on a mission."

"You're doing too much," she said, rather frightened. "Perugia will suit Enrico very well."

"You're only thinking of Enrico! As far as I'm concerned Perugia and Modica are all the same—they're both the abyss, the infinite separation. I want . . . Doretta in Rome! Do you understand me, Doretta?"

There was a knock at the door and through the opening came the well-trimmed beard of the head of the cabinet, and his Neapolitan voice, "Let me know whenever it's convenient for you to see the Honorable Barazzoni . . . he's in my office."

"Why he's always here!" Doretta exclaimed, when the face had disappeared back of the curtain.

"He has a pretty girl in mind, too. We're all alike when it comes to pretty girls."

"I wonder what he'll think if he sees me again. I don't want to meet him—it's the second time."

"In that case, Doretta, stay with me so long that he gets tired of waiting, and goes."

But Doretta seemed nervous and upset and she looked around, as if seeking another door, and said:

"I can't stay very long . . . my . . . aunt is waiting for me in the church of Santa Maria della Minerva."

He sighed.

"Yes, there's another door. But don't run away. If

you knew the good it does me to rest my eyes on your loveliness! You really want to go? Then promise"—and he caught both her hands and looked her seriously and darkly in the eyes—"you must promise to come back Saturday, at five, or rather at six, to get Enrico's decree. Will you promise?"

He kissed her hand, murmuring, "Thanks, Doretta."

With a more serene, almost light tone, he continued: "Or better, let's arrange it this way. Don't make any appointment with your aunt. And let us dine like two good friends who have a last meal, together, in the restaurant at the station before they take the train, one to go to the left and the other to the right forever."

She hesitated. She was obviously worried, and murmured with lowered eyes:

"But what will Enrico say?"

"Must you tell Enrico? Is it settled, Doretta, for Saturday?"

"But you will give me the decree?" She turned and looked him in the eyes. "I must have something to justify . . . my conscience."

"Dearest!" he murmured as if giving her a kiss, and added: "If you'd really rather not meet Barazzoni, you'll have to forgive me for showing you out this way."

He opened a paneled door in the wall. It led into a corridor with a glass window to one side, through which one caught sight of a bathroom. In front a door opened on a bedroom. It was a roughly furnished, austere room, with a cot covered with a vicuña rug.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, surprised. "Is this where you sleep?"

"Sometimes."

"Isn't it queer! When people spoke to me of the 'Ministry' I never thought one could sleep here—I thought it was something big and empty, like a church."

"How strange you are, Doretta! Strange . . . and adorable."

She pushed him away, gently, by placing both her hands on his chest, and murmured:

"Till Saturday."

"Saturday."

Then she passed through half-opened doors and ante-rooms to the landing place of a secret staircase, and as she went down, she murmured to herself:

"How happy I am!"

She didn't know exactly why she was happy—but she was happy. So happy that she wound her way ever, ever so slowly, to prolong the sensation. She found herself, at last, in the long cloisters and saw, through the grillwork, the Minerva square, and she opened the large door. Out in the square stood a cab. She hesitated a moment, as if annoyed, then she went up to it and stepped in.

Enrico was waiting for her, all excitement—he was hiding in the back of the carriage. He asked nervously:

"And what's the decision?"

"Perugia!"

"Doretta darling! My own Doretta! How glad I am that I stayed! Have you the decree?"

"I'm going to fetch it Saturday."

And again she felt so happy that she seemed to melt into her own happiness; and she didn't know why.

His Excellency Raffaele Berovini was as thrilled as a boy over his first love affair. Doretta, when she came into the room, seemed preoccupied, almost trembling, but she listened patiently, smiling as if she scarcely understood the words the minister was saying. And he was talking, talking as if to lull her and to make the time pass, without her realising it.

Suddenly she interrupted to ask if Enrico's decree was ready, at last.

He pressed an electric button and said to the private secretary who came into the room:

"Do me a favor, Sorbolli! Ask Commander Rifratta to give you the decree in regard to Professor Vantori's transfer."

Sorbolli let a quarter of an hour pass and then returned to say, as His Excellency had instructed him to:

"Commander Rifratta asks Your Excellency to please wait a little longer. He has had to clear up certain points

at Court in regard to registrations. In an hour or two he will send the decree over—and in that way, if Your Excellency doesn't come back tonight, Your Excellency will find it on the desk tomorrow morning. Is there anything else?"

"No, thank you."

"Well, in that case," said the minister gayly as the secretary left, "let us hurry up and dine. In a couple of hours we can come back and send the good news to that much too lucky man. Shall we play a little trick? Doretta, go down and wait for me at the foot of the stairs—I'll escape by the hidden staircase. In the courtyard you'll find the minister's closed carriage—it's as solemn and mysterious as a . . . cardinal's! We'll drive to the Porta del Popolo, then we'll take a cab and go and dine at Ponte Milvio . . . and give the director general time to send his decree around."

The idea pleased her.

Everything pleased her in that enchanted night—the regular rumbling of the carriage in the last rays of the sunset, the smartness of the semi-deserted restaurant, the obsequiousness of the waiters who, seeing the medallion on His Excellency's chain, called him "Honorable," and the clever and half sentimental talk of Raffaele Berovini who, every now and then, would stop talking to look at her like a famished man making an effort to take his eyes away from her and start talking again.

She did not say anything. She was gently moved, lost in the softness of the hour as in a distant youth.

"Why don't you speak, Doretta? What are you thinking of?"

"I'd like the evening to last—I wish I never had to go away."

"And yet it's getting so late that we'll have to go."

"No," she implored, as if frightened, and then begged, softly, "let us stay a little longer."

"Let us stay a little longer. And if you'd prefer not to go back to Rome at once, we will walk as far as the gates."

They walked slowly in the mellow night, closer and closer side by side. When the first row of lampposts appeared

Doretta stopped and sighed as if there, on the edge of the light, the distant dream had to cease, irrevocably. His arm was around her waist, he passed his lips over hers and felt her vibrate and suddenly draw back, with a heavy sigh.

And suddenly he wanted to hurry. He called a passing cab, and his desire shortened the ride toward the Pantheon. He left the cab, with Doretta, before reaching the Piazza della Minerva, and as if afraid that she would slip away, Berovini took her gently by the arm, leading her to the closed door of the ministry, talking all the time, and hiding the trembling in his voice lest she become aware of the step she was about to take.

But she was aware of it, and while His Excellency paused, for a moment, to let her in, she stiffened and said anxiously:

"No. I'll wait for you here."

Berovini recovered his composure enough to laugh:

"In the square? At this hour of the night? And if some one comes along and steals her, what'll I do when I come down and don't find Doretta?"

And as she seemed to hesitate, her face embittered by who could say what thoughts, he insisted:

"Why, Doretta? Are you afraid of the solemnity—of this . . . church? Give me your hand, let me lead you."

She let herself be led, but she sighed. They passed through the cloisters, lighted by a pale lantern, and they came to the secret staircase which, a few days before, Doretta had descended with such delight.

When they were at the top, and had passed through the dark anteroom, she felt, in the darkness, that she was in the little room with the austere furniture and the cot covered with the vicuña rug, and before he had time to turn on the light, she murmured, as if afraid:

"Don't let's stay here!"

And then the electric light flashed through the corridor which led to His Excellency's office, and she smiled, as if exhausted, and sank down on the first chair she found.

"And now," she panted as if out of breath, "give me Enrico's transfer, and let me go."

"Enrico, Enrico," he smiled, "is there no one in the world except Enrico?"

He was not impatient, he felt so sure, now, of having her in his power. He walked lightly up to the writing table, took out a paper, read it, gave it to Doretta with an envelope already addressed to the director of the schools of Syracuse, and he handed it to the pretty woman.

"Here you are, mail it yourself. Is it all right now? Are you happy? Really happy? And you think I deserve such harshness and such somber eyes? Then look me in the face and take off the hat which hides you. You're in the shadow—I want to be sure that it's really you, under the hat. I'm afraid someone put a stranger in your place, in the carriage."

She lifted up her face to smile. And then Berovini suddenly took her hat off and put it on the desk and he gazed at her and said, filled with emotion:

"How young you are!"

Doretta felt as if she were being stripped, and she lowered her eyes and shrank back, as if trying to hide herself with her hands.

"Would you like a cigarette? No? How far away and frightened you seem! You look as though you would scream if I touched your hand."

She gave him her hand and Berovini took it gently, and kissed it. Then, holding her by this same hand, he led her from the chair over to the divan, and he sat down beside her and slipped his arm around her waist. Her expression seemed to grow more bitter, more tired and she sighed.

"No, please don't."

"Are you angry with me? Am I offending you?"

She looked at him and whispered, softly:

"Oh, no."

"Do I frighten you?"

"No! Of course not! How could you, you so good, so kind, so considerate. Oh, no!"

"Then why are you so unbending? Won't you give me a little of yourself? Why not? What is it you don't like?"

She scarcely answered. Without brusquerie, with a sort of tired gentleness that had something of an imploration about it, she repulsed him, and at the same time she seemed to be begging him to excuse her for repulsing him. Now and then she looked at him intently, opened her lips as if

she wanted to burst out into a confession or a passionate appeal—but she would sigh, suddenly, and break off the words before they were spoken. In a moment of revolt Berovini was on the point of exclaiming:

“You mean you’re so fond of the husband who, after all, brought you here to barter you for a post!”

But he was too much of an expert in the art of love-making to utter the dangerous words, and he determined to attack in some other way. But he was unnerved, and already exhausted. He sought some honorable way out of the defeat. She realised it, and murmured:

“Please excuse me. It’s not because of anything, or anybody . . . it’s for my own sake . . . and yours . . . please excuse me and let me go.”

“At this hour of the night? And if you were to meet a tramp, or even only a policeman? At this hour? Impossible.”

She seemed to shrivel up again and asked with frightened eyes, “What shall I do then? If you’ll go to your room, I’ll stay here, I won’t disturb you.”

“Since you don’t want me . . . since you wished to humiliate the man . . . you needn’t be afraid . . . the gentleman, only, remains. If you please. This is your room. I’m going back to the office——” he smiled bitterly, “to bemoan my lost happiness.

“I mean,” he added, as he held her hand, at the threshold, “if Doretta should be sorry that she was so cruel, she will not lock her door.”

He walked back to the office, his heart throbbing, and waited. There was a moment of uncertainty, a moment of eternal waiting, filled with fire. Then slowly—and there was a shock on both sides of the door—the spring snapped and the key creaked as it turned in the lock—and His Excellency returned miserably to his office.

The next morning the head of the cabinet was surprised not to hear the joyous voice of the minister, when he knocked at the door. He looked at Berovini—he was pale and his face seemed full of wrinkles, and his eyes were tired.

He asked guardedly:

"Already at work, Your Excellency?"

"Still at it!" he replied, half jokingly and half bitterly.

He threw a pile of documents over to Bercore, and continued, "I couldn't sleep, so I worked. Would you be so kind as to ring?" And when the usher appeared, "Coffee!" Before going out the usher said, "The Honorable Barazzoni is here."

The minister repressed an impatient gesture and replied, "Ask him to come in."

As Barazzoni came into the room, His Excellency tried to find his usual jocundity, and handing the deputy a bundle of papers, he cried:

"Here I've been working all night to please you!"

The deputy laughed.

"With that face? You look as though you'd spent the night with Doretta."

"With whom?"

"Doretta. She pretended not to see me as she skipped out of the door of the ministry—but my eyes are good. Where did you hide her last night?"

The head of the cabinet disappeared, prudently, while His Excellency tried to collect the remnants of his dispersed good humour to laugh:

"Do you know you're in the Ministry of Public Instruction? You mustn't think it's a house of ill repute, just because you frequent it!" But the idea that his colleague credited him with the habits and good fortunes of a libertine did not displease him, and he asked, feigning indifference:

"Who is this Doretta?"

"That's the game, pretend you don't know. As if I didn't see her a week ago in your waiting room with that decorated captain whom she tried to pass off as her husband."

"Pass off? Why?"

"How do I know? You ought to know which one served as passport for the other!"

"Are you sure the lady wasn't the wife of the professor we transferred to Perugia?"

Barazzoni laughed.

"What? She brought you a captain first and then a professor? And she introduces them all as husbands? She must have a collection! She began her career with a general who kept her in a villa between Abano and Battaglia; I saw her again at Udine with a colonel of the Bersaglieri; but when the colonel was taken prisoner the poor girl, in order not to be repatriated, had to be satisfied with captains and even" he added, twirling his moustache, "with modest deputies. I met her again a few weeks ago in a very smart apartment, a very discreet apartment belonging to a very respectable aunt who lives surrounded by three or four nieces . . . not more."

"Are you sure?" Berovini asked dumfounded.

"Come with me some night, if you want to see for yourself."

And as His Excellency frowned, he said, "Oh, it's a very respectable house, very well frequented. You needn't be afraid to go there—you won't meet anybody except, perhaps, at worst, a colleague or so, from the Catholic populist party."

"The scoundrell!" the minister exclaimed.

"Why? She's a dear, well-meaning child, reserved and full of honest scruples . . ."

"I wasn't referring to her. To him."

And he planted his finger on the electric button and left it there until Sorbolli rushed in from the private secretary's room.

"Be so kind as to bring me Professor Vantori's file. Let us see if there is any change in the records of his family relationships."

Sorbolli came back, scanning the card. "No change, Your Excellency."

Berovini took the card and read out loud. "Unmarried." And he repeated. "The scoundrell!"

Then he burst into laughter.

"He's really clever! Too much of a scoundrell! We'll have to brand him with a sign, so that people will know he's coming. Call Bercore. Bercore!"

"Your Excellency."

"We'll have to decorate this scoundrell!"

And he turned to his friend Barazzoni and said in a voice which seemed aggressive in its attempt to be jocose:

"And you think I have scruples? That I'm afraid of meeting the phalanges of Catholic deputies? Just come around and fetch me, tonight."

The mention of the honorable Barazzoni's name was enough. The door opened at the end of the hall, and then it closed, and His Excellency was left alone in a tiny salon. It was like a box lined with silk in deeper and lighter shades of pink. In the center was a table with a large bunch of flowers, and back of the table was a little sofa which was left partly in the shadow. There was a high standing lamp veiled with a lace lampshade.

Doretta came in lightly, in a vaporous, foaming wrapper and stopped suddenly, when she saw him. She grew pale, very pale and without saying anything, or making a movement, without a sob, she began to cry.

"Don't," said Berovini gently, "don't cry about it. Why? I've come . . . I mean, I'm not angry."

"I felt so happy—I had one clear joy—and now you've spoiled it. Why did you come?"

He was the one to make excuses.

"Doretta, I came because I couldn't understand. I'm so stupid, you see, that they've made me university professor and deputy, and minister, even, and I can't understand anything—it's natural. I'd like to know why . . . why you played with me last night. After you had the decree, there really wasn't any reason for you to make fun of me."

"Make fun of you? I didn't make fun of you. I was so fond of you. You were so good—you said things to me I had never heard. How can you think that I made fun of you?"

"Well then, why? It's still harder . . ."

"No, it isn't hard to understand. I never realised what it was to have a husband, to be a good woman. I wasn't a good woman. . . . I knew that in order to satisfy that unscrupulous fellow I'd have to do what the women of my profession do and I didn't mind the idea. But you—you

thought I was a good woman, to you I was the wife of someone else, don't you see? And you were so kind, you treated me like a lady, you were really in love with me and you were respectful, you spoke so nicely. . . . I couldn't bear to fall in your esteem! I wanted one man to think of me as something else than a. . . . And I liked you so much, I was so grateful to you. . . . I loved you, and the thought of being to you what I am to everybody else seemed unbearable. I respected you—it would have been like an insult. Do you understand?"

He nodded, to show that he understood. But in his heart, he thought:

"And yet, how happy I would have been if you had respected me a little less, Doretta!"

But he did not say so. He felt too ashamed.

THE RED NOTEBOOK

By LUIGI PIRANDELLO

NISIAS: a big village living its busy life on a narrow strip of shore by the Sicilian sea.

To be born under unfavourable conditions is not the exclusive prerogative of mankind. Villages, no more than men, choose the place or manner of their birth; they see the light of day when and where natural necessity demands the creation of life.

If, drawn by that very need, men rush to the place or breed too rapidly there, or if the space itself is too restricted it follows that the village in question cannot have a normal growth. To extend itself, Nisias was compelled to hoist itself, house by house, up the bare, steep sides of the neighbouring plateau which, just beyond the village, overhangs threateningly the sea. On this vast and airy plateau Nisias might have spread itself out comfortably, but that would have entailed leaving the shore. And then, one would perhaps have some day witnessed the strange spectacle of some house, forcibly planted up there, striding down to the shore, with its slaty headgear firmly on, and wrapped tightly in its environs. The truth is, life is busy on the shore.

The men of Nisias have put their cemetery on the plateau. The dead must have air. "We will breathe up there," say the men of Nisias. They speak thus because down there, on the shore, one can hardly breathe amid the noisy, dusty traffic in sulphur, coal, wood, cereals and salted fish. No, one cannot breathe there. Those who want air must go seek it up there. They go up there when they are dead, so they imagine they will breathe when they are dead. Which doubtless affords them consolation.

One must make allowances for the men of Nisias, for it is a difficult thing to practice honesty when you are so badly situated.

In these wretched houses, squeezed up against each other, dens rather than human habitations, there brews a horrible, heavy, moist, acrid stench that would corrupt the straightest virtue. To help corrupt virtue further—or, if you will, to increase the stench—there are pigs and poultry in the houses; pretty often, there is, in addition, a small donkey treading his litter. The smoke, finding no exit, remains stagnant in these hovels, blackening ceilings and walls. From their soot-encrusted chromos on the walls, the patron saints leer down in disgust.

Brutalised as they are most of the day by toil and discipline on the quays or on board ship, the men are hardly conscious of these things; but the women get their fill of them; they become mad, and it looks as if their favoured cure for this madness were to breed children. It is indeed awful! One woman has twelve children, another fourteen, another sixteen. . . . True, they succeed in bringing up only three or four to man's estate. But every baby that dies helps on those who are lucky or unlucky enough (it is a moot point which) to survive. For each woman, on the death of one of her infants, rushes down to the Abandoned Children's Shelter, and takes on a nursling, together with a red booklet, which brings in six francs per calendar month for a good many years.

All cloth merchants in Nisias are Maltese. They may have been born in Sicily, but they are none the less Maltese. "Go to the Maltese" means in Nisias, "Go buy some cloth." And the Maltese with their half-yard measure make a golden business out of Nisias. They buy up these famous red booklets in exchange for two hundred francs' worth of goods: a marriage trousseau.

In this way, the maids of Nisias get husbands, thanks to the red booklets of the abandoned children to whom their mothers have to give the breast.

It is a fine sight, at the end of every month, to see the procession of silent, fat-bellied Maltese, with embroidered slippers and black silk caps, in one hand a big red handkerchief, in the other a silver or horn snuffbox, filing up to the municipal buildings, each with ten to fifteen of these red booklets. They set them down in rows on the seats in the

long, dusty lobby whereon the little windows of the cash office open. They wait their turn, peacefully slumbering, or stuffing their nostrils with snuff, or gently chasing away the flies. The paying out of the nursing money to the Maltese is a tradition in Nisias.

"Marenga," the official calls out.

"She is present," gravely answers the Maltese.

Marenga Rose de Nicolao is well known in the municipal buildings of Nisias. For a period of over twenty years she feeds the usurious practice of the Maltese with an uninterrupted series of red booklets.

No man knows how many of her babies have died. She has lost count herself. She has brought up four, all girls. Three are married, and she has just safely got her fourth engaged.

Looking at her, it were hard to say whether this was a woman or a heap of rags. So much so that the Maltese to whom she had gone for her three eldest, had refused her credit for her fourth.

"Gnora Rosilla," they said, "you will never manage it."

"I not manage it? I?"

She felt so deeply offended in her pride as a human milk cow that, since discussion is clearly impossible with silent Maltese, she took to howling loudly in front of their shop.

Since they had given her a child at the Shelter, was that not clear proof of her nursing capacity?

Hearing which argument, behind the shady counter of their shop, the Maltese just smiled and shook their heads. You may think they had little faith in the doctor and in the mayor's assistant whose duty it was to care for the interests of the abandoned children. Yet such was not the case. The Maltese well know that, in the eyes of both doctor and mayor's assistant, the fate of a mother who has a daughter to place and can only manage it by means of a red booklet, is infinitely more important than the fate of an abandoned nursling. If the kid dies, no one will weep. If it suffers, no one will complain.

A daughter is a daughter, a found nursling is a found nursling, and that is all there is to it. Besides, if the daugh-

ter does not marry she will probably in the future add to the number of children for whom the community will have to care.

But, while it is true that the death of a found child is a stroke of good luck for the community, it is a stroke of exceedingly bad luck for the Maltese, even if he should manage to recover the goods he gave on credit. So it is no uncommon thing to see, at certain hours of the day, the Maltese making their rounds of inspection under pretext of taking a constitutional, through the filthy vennels full of naked, earthy, sunbaked children, grunting pigs and cackling hens, while the mothers with the red booklets gossip or, more frequently, quarrel on the doorsteps.

The nurslings are the objects of care on the part of the Maltese just as the pigs on the part of the women. Some Maltese, in their anxiety, have been known to induce their wives to give the breast for half an hour daily to some particularly starved-looking nurslings. Let us pass on.

Rose Marenga ended by discovering a second-class Maltese, just beginning to set up in business, who consented to advance her in several instalments, not as usual two hundred, but merely one hundred and forty francs. With this the bridegroom and his parents declared themselves satisfied, so the engagement was proceeded with.

Now, in a sort of sack stretched out on reed circlets and hung by two pieces of string in a corner of the hovel, a hungry nursling howls from morn till night, while Rose Marenga's daughter Tuzza practises lovemaking with her fiancé, laughs, sews at her trousseau and, from time to time, tugs at the string in order to rock this primitive cradle.

"There, there, little one . . . Holy Virgin, what a *retique* kid!"

Retique comes from *heretic* and means nervous, irritable, annoying, ill-tempered. For Christian folk this is a very proper and amiable way of judging heretics. A little milk, and the tiny heretic would promptly become a Christian. But Mother Rose has not much milk these days. . . .

Tuzza had to make up her mind to wed to the accompaniment of these despairing howls. Had it not been necessary for her to get married, her mother would this time, under

the stress of conscience, not have taken on a nursling. She took it for Tuzza. It is for Tuzza the baby is crying, that she may go lovemaking. And love easily drowns the cries of starvation.

The groom, who is a stevedore working in the harbour, comes in the evening when work is over. If it is a fine night, mother, daughter and groom climb up to the plateau to breathe fresh air by moonlight; the kid remains alone in the dark in his stuffy den, hanging in his make-believe cot, howling ever. The neighbours hear it with annoyance, or anger, or anguish or pity; all are agreed in wishing it were dead. Such uninterrupted howling is enough to stop anyone's peaceful breathing.

Even the pig is annoyed, and grunts angrily. The hens are afraid and huddle close together behind the stove. What are they cackling low to each other?

Several of them have been mothers and have experienced the anguish of hearing from afar the cry of some chick that had lost its way. With fluttering wings and crest erect they had rushed in all directions and never stopped till they had found it again. How is it the mother of this little one, who must certainly be lost, does not run up on hearing its cries?

Hens are silly things. They even sit on eggs others have laid, and when these eggs hatch out, they are unable to distinguish between these chicks and those that have come out of their own eggs; they love them equally and bring them up with the same care. Moreover they have no idea that human chicks are not content with maternal heat but crave also for maternal milk.

The pig knows this well, however. He remembers he craved for milk too, and his mother, for all she was but a sow, used to give it to him night and day, as much as he wanted. So he cannot imagine that it is lack of milk that causes this howling, and, twisting about in his dark corner, he protests with the anger of a well sated pig against the suckling in its cot, which for him too is *retique*. Come, little one! Let the young fat pig sleep, and the hens and the entire neighbourhood. Be assured Mother Rose would give thee milk if she had any; but she has none.

If thy real mother, the unknown mother, had no mercy on thee, how should this one have? She needs all her pity for her own daughter. Let her then breathe freely up there the air she needs to rest her from the day's toil, and find her pleasure in witnessing the happiness of her lovestricken daughter who wanders in the moonlight arm in arm with her lover. If thou didst but know what luminous veil, all woven of dew and sweet-sounding with silvery melodies, the moon extends over them! An infinite craving for goodness streams into Tuzza's soul in this enchanted atmosphere, and she is sure she will simply worship her children.

Come, little one, suck your tiny finger in default of anything better, and fall asleep. Your tiny finger? Great heavens! What is this? The left thumb has become so big that it will hardly go into your mouth: it has swollen enormously out of the little thin, stiff, frozen hand. It alone of the whole of the tiny body is big. With that thumb in your mouth, one would think you had sucked yourself dry, till nothing was left but skin on your bones, but how then, and where, do you find strength to howl as you do?

What a miracle! Coming home from their moonlit walk, the mother, the daughter and the groom found complete silence that night in the den.

"Whisht, please," the mother warned, as the lovers wanted to go on talking on the doorstep.

Yes, let us be very quiet. But Tuzza cannot keep down little outbursts of laughter at certain words her fiancé whispers in her ears. Words . . . or was it kisses? In the dark it is hard to tell. Mother Rose had entered the hovel and drawn near to the cot and was listening. Silence. A moonray slid on the floor like a ghost, from the shadow of the door to right under the oven where the hens had sought shelter. Some of them are disturbed by the light and are moving about uneasily. The Devil take them. Likewise her old husband who has just come home from the saloon, drunk as usual, and is stumbling on the doorstep to avoid the lovers.

Curious thing . . . no noise seems to wake the child. Yet as a rule he sleeps so lightly that the flutter of a fly's

wings would wake him. Mother Rose is afraid. She lights the lamp. Cautiously she extends her arm and touches the nursling's forehead. Then, she utters a sudden yell.

Tuzza runs up, but the lover remains, puzzled and hesitant, at the door. What's that Mother Rose is shouting to him? To come at once and undo one of the strings that holds the cot? But why? Come! Quickly, quickly! She knows well enough why, does Mother Rose.

But the young man, gripped with sudden cold at the child's silence, is incapable of motion; he stays where he is, anxious and sullen. Then Mother Rose jumped up on a chair, before the neighbours could come in, and cut the string, shouting the while to Tuzza to clothe the child.

What a misfortune! What a misfortune indeed! The string broke, who knows how? Anyway it broke and the little one fell out of the cradle and is dead. He was found dead, quite cold and rigid. What a misfortune! What a misfortune indeed!

The whole night long, even after the departure of the neighbours whom her shouts had called in, she spent herself in crying and moaning; hardly had the new day begun than she started again, relating the event to all who showed themselves on the threshold.

Fallen, has he? How can that be, since the tiny dead body bears no wound, no bruise, no scratch even? But he is frightfully thin and then . . . that enormous thumb on the left hand!

The doctor left after his visit with a shrug of the shoulders, pulling a queer face. With one voice, the neighbours attested the child had died of starvation.

The lover, though he must have known the anguish that possessed Tuzza, did not show up. To make up for it, his mother and married sister arrived noiselessly, coldly, their lips pinched, to witness the scene with the Maltese, the little Maltese just setting up in business, who threw himself furiously into the hovel in order to recover the goods he had given on credit.

Rose Marenga is racking her voice, tearing her hair, hitting face and breasts with her fists, uncovering her breasts to show she has still got milk. She begs for pity,

mercy for her daughter. Let him at least grant a delay till evening, to give her time to run to the mayor, the assistant, the doctor . . . pity, pity!

Then she runs off, shouting, her hair all awry, arms lifted up to the heavens, pursued by the whistles and scoffs of the street urchins.

The entire neighbourhood, in a state of great excitement, was congregated about the house, surrounding the little Maltese who was mounting guard on his possessions, and the mother and sister of the fiancé, who were waiting to see the outcome of the incident.

A charitable woman from near by entered the house and helped Tuzza, who was quite spent with crying, to wash and dress the tiny body. As no new developments arose, people got tired of waiting, as did the fiancé's relatives, so they all went home, leaving the little Maltese alone, immovable, like a sentry on duty.

The entire crowd assembled in front of the house once more at nightfall, when the funeral carriage arrived that was to take the dead body of the child to the cemetery.

Already they had laid it in the little deal coffin and were lifting it on to the carriage, when, amid the stupefied exclamations of the crowd, not unmixed with hisses and jeers, there appeared, beaming triumphantly, Rose Marenga, bearing another nursling in her arms.

"Here's one! Here's one!" she cried, showing him off to her daughter, who was now smiling amid her tears while the funeral procession wended its way slowly up to the cemetery.

VASSITZA

By MOMCHILO MILOSHLEVITCH

VASSILI PETROVITCH, a clerk in one of the ministries, stood in his chief's office, whilst this worthy, sitting at the table, was lecturing him. His face was pale, his beard scarce and he himself of small stature. He stood as a convict before his judge, and only from time to time allowed himself to look out of the window. At last the chief turned his plain broad face to him and looked straight at him with cold, green eyes:

"This is quite beyond understanding," he said in a discontented voice. "You hardly know what you are doing, my man! Every day something goes wrong, and I believe you're carrying on like this on purpose. It's simply awful!" He thumped the table with his fist, folded his arms and began his lecture afresh:

"And people always said you were a good clerk! Well I've been doing my very best lately to be kind to you, but it's all of no use at all! On the one hand I have administrative troubles, on the other annoyance from visitors and now I've got to put up with worries from my subordinates. Call yourself a cultured being, do you, sir? Where are your eyes, I'd like to know? See for yourself: your work is all wrong! Look! 28,456 is the number you should find!" Vassili moved two paces towards the table and looked at the paper his superior had thrust before him.

"Do you see?"

"Yes; I did that," he faltered.

"Oh you did, did you? Well it's a fine piece of work, sir. For all you care the treasury might go smash and the country to the dogs! Very fine! Wonderful!" Vassili Petrovitch moved back one step:

"If you please, sir," he began, "all of that is not my work."

"Oh it isn't, then whose is it? Stepanovitch, I suppose;

you are both of the same kidney. Now go and put that work straight at once!"

The clerk bowed and left the room, his eyes fixed upon the floor. This lecturing had made his head ache. Vassili Petrovitch was a quiet man, whose ambition was to become chief clerk in his ministry.

He went back to his own office, sat down at his table, and after telling the usher no one was to disturb him, began his work over again.

During the last few days, he had left the office half an hour before his fellow clerks, and had sometimes been late in the morning. But he always worked steadily, not like his colleagues who spent most of their working hours reading novels, drinking coffee and telling smoking-room stories. He never sent the usher out into the town on such errands as "Ilia, bring me a cup of coffee," or "Ilia, go and buy me some cigarettes." His usual instructions were "Please, Ilia, be good enough to take these papers to the chief to sign."

On entering the departmental building, he always let his friends pass before him: "After you," he used to say politely, as if addressing the minister himself. After a first look at him, most men would say: "Here's a really good fellow."

"Vassitza" was the name by which he was known by all his comrades and even to the servants of the big building on the Dorchola street, where he'd been working for over ten years.

His life passed quietly, without any change in it. After his work he used to go home, avoiding the large streets of the city, but passing by the Danube quays, where he enjoyed the prattle of many voices and the smell of fresh fish in the air.

After dinner, Vassitza used to sit and chat with the neighbours. These were an old retired army man, who had been through many wars and a sick nobleman with his bad-tempered wife.

Then they all used to talk about old Serbian wars, about life getting dearer every day, about heating next winter and such like subjects.

"Yes, bad times have come, Mr. Vassitza," Steve, the old soldier, would say in a trembling voice. "Bad for all of us. We work all day long and sometimes all night and earn next to nothing. Was it to come to this pass that we went assiduously to school in our young days?"

Vassitza would answer with a little laugh: "Always work and work. Life is made that way. Serbia requires our work."

In the winter they used to meet at Steve's house, where it was cozy and warm. The old fellow lay on the bed, his wife sewing dresses or slippers while Vassitza used to read short stories like "The Two Clergymen" or "A Bad Fellow," which they all knew by heart.

Then he used to go back to his small room, light his lamp and begin to write. What he wrote nobody ever knew, but when they saw the light at his window they said: "That's Vassitza writing and at midnight, too!"

And so time rolled on. Summers followed winters and winters followed summers and nothing ever changed. Everybody knew him and liked him, in the big house where he lived.

But suddenly there came a change in his ways. Those who had known him before could hardly believe he was the same man. He bought himself a new suit, altered the cut of his beard and began to look smarter altogether. Little by little his character changed too, and he became harsher and colder with those around him. He remembered the way the chief had lectured him and his words: "You're just Vassitza, that's all you are! You will never change." He could still hear the thumps on the desk that had punctuated the chief's words: "Why should it be my fault," he thought. "You, Chief, are the one to blame—yes, you are! You are the simpleton, sir, not I. I've always been decent and polite to you, and that is the way you repay me! It was Stepanovitch's blunder, not mine, so what right had you to say to me: 'You don't do your work properly yourself, and you know it!'" "I am very sorry, Mr. Vassitza," the chief would say in these imaginary conversations, "please forgive me." "What did you say, sir? There is no excuse whatever, and in the future please call me Mr. Petrovitch! Do you understand?"

"Please don't get angry, Mr. Petrovitch," the chief would plead. "Excuse me, I'm a nervous man myself and cannot always keep my temper. Think of it—my wife and I have been worried for ten years! It is all driving me mad."

"That's none of my business!" answered Vassitza. "What do I care for your wife's bad temper. I am not responsible for it, am I?"

The boss would bow and offer him his hand: "Once more, please forgive me; I'll see to your advancement soon!" he said with a little laugh.

"You'll see to it, will you! And you dare say that now after what you've done to me! As a matter of fact you've given Alexis Prokitch two promotions in six months. Because he is your man, and flatters you, while I am only a bit of dirt. Shame, sir, shame on you!" And he came nearer to the table, showing his fist as the superior had done to him before, until he saw Alexis Prokitch, a first clerk, tall, in a black jacket and well shaved.

"What's happened, Mr. Petrovitch?" began the other with a cynical smile. "You're a class lower than I am, and you carry on like this. Because of one of the boss's lectures!"

Vassitza hardly believed his ears, and turned on the intruder, crimson with rage.

"Because of a lecture. What a lie! I've always said what I thought right truthfully. But I'm a quiet, well-behaved man, and I would not like to see you get red in the face, if you heard the whole truth I've got in store for you. Well, I will tell you all the same. You've sold yourself to get an advancement. And you ought to be ashamed!"

And far into the night Vassitza went on thinking how he would pour his protests in the office next day. He was like a sick man and could not get to sleep. At last his eyes closed from fatigue and he fell asleep.

But the next morning, as he was going to his office, he felt all his desire for revenge disappear, and when he arrived he greeted everyone with his usual polite "Good morning!"

He took his usual place in the office; through the window

he could see the usual crowd of men and women waiting to be admitted.

A few days before the summer holidays, Vassitza was sitting at his table writing, when A. Prokitch came in, looking as happy and merry as ever. It was very hot, the sun was blazing, and Vassitza felt uncomfortable in his winter suit. A. Prokitch was dressed in a light coat, cream flannel trousers, and snow-white tennis shoes. He took an armchair, crossed his legs high over each other, lit a cigarette.

"I don't know how you can work in such heat," he began with a smile. "You're a wonderful fellow. I can't even take a pen in my hand. Oh, by the way, have you heard the latest? The boss asked the minister himself about it. I'm going to get the 'White Eagle' of the fifth class. I tell you this in the strictest confidence, I must say I think I have deserved it by now. I made a full statistical report recently; it was very long but it was worth it to get the 'White Eagle!'"

"Yes, it must have been very long," said Vassitza mildly.

"There was some talk about you too," Prokitch went on, "but there was an impression that you didn't want a decoration. Anyhow, you're on the next list."

He rose, fondling his smart tie and said: "Good-bye! You're busy, I see!"

After the other had left, Vassitza began thinking again. He still saw Prokitch dressed in spotless white and so pleased with himself, and he began to feel really tired. He looked again and again at the clock, wishing the time would go on faster, until at a quarter to five the door opened again and in came Aksenti Simitch, his best friend, a clerk in another ministry, a tall, strong-looking fellow.

"Look here, Vassitza," he began, "could you lend me one hundred dinars? I need them terribly badly. You'll have them back in a few days."

Vassitza looked at him curiously, took out his purse and handed his friend a hundred-dinar note:

"Here you are!"

Simitch twisted his moustache contentedly, mumbled something incomprehensible as thanks and left the room.

Vassitza started work again. He felt worn out. He went home the usual way, but as he opened the door of his house he heard a plaintive cry coming from old Steve's house.

It was Nada's voice, old Steve's youngest daughter. "I'm too unhappy," she was saying, "sister darling, I'm a poor girl."

Vassitza ran through the house and up to Steve's room. On the bed was Nada. She was ill and her mother and sister were standing by her and comforting her. In the middle of the room stood the father, looking run down and miserable, his arms hanging limply by his sides.

"She fell down," said Steve as soon as he saw Vassitza, "Here in the room, from the window sill."

"Keep calm," said Vassitza, "let's hope it's nothing much!" He took the old man's arm and led him out for a walk. Then he came back to the sick girl who, on hearing them, sighed deeply and closed her eyes. Vassitza stood deep in thought. The night was hot and stuffy. The low room, with its ceiling decorated with red flowers, was lit only by a small lamp. Helen, the girl's sister, was sitting on the invalid's bed and holding her hands. From the next room one could hear the grandfather's clock ticking away. Everything was peaceful.

Vassitza stayed there till midnight. He was weary, dropping with fatigue. He felt an immense pity for the poor sick girl, and also for her father and sister. Likewise, and for the first time, he felt tremendously alone in the world. Old Steve was calling him:

"Oh, my God!" he was saying continuously.

Vassitza followed him. They went down to the Danube banks, where all was quiet.

"Don't leave me, brother," the old man said, "I'm alone now! I've worked all my life, but for what? For nothing. I suppose I'll die now."

"Everything is in God's hands," answered Vassitza. Then the old man went back home, and Vassitza stood in the yard for some time, and then he too went up to his room.

In bed he remembered old Steve's words: "We work for nothing all our lives!" Vassitza sat up on his bed, and his body suddenly became cold.

"These are my sentiments too," he said to himself. "Yet—no—, I'm only forty and have surely a while to live. I'll get my own house soon and make a fine living!"

"A fine living," he thought he heard Alexis Prokitch's voice laughing at him. "You stay in the same class for three years. Your life is finished, man."

"Well, I want to die as I have lived, openly and honestly. I do not want to have you people disturbing me."

Then he seemed to hear a sound like "boom, boom" like a muffled knocking at the door. And there stood Aksenti Simitch, wanting to borrow another one hundred dinars. But he could not afford to oblige him, being too poor just then.

"Oh, let me die in peace," moaned Vassitza; "all alone—as I have been all my life," and he cried like a child; then he realised he had high fever. His bones seemed to beat against one another, and his eyes to stand out of their orbits. At last, just before dawn, he fell asleep.

The night was stormy, and big clouds stood in the sky.

II

So ran the course of Vassitza's life. Two summers and a winter went by; then came a chilly autumn. One cold night, old Steve died, regretted by all his friends and particularly so by his daughters. Vassitza was saddened by the death of his old friend and began to write again at night.

He received nobody, and lived like a hermit. But time heals all things and in due course the neighbouring household revived in a new form, presided over by Helen, Steve's now married daughter.

Early in October, Vassitza was promoted into a higher class in the service.

One evening when a strong wind was whipping up great rollers on the Danube, Vassitza asked his neighbours to supper. And when they had left, he could not take his mind off Nada, Steve's youngest daughter, whom he had missed during her illness. That night he could not sleep, he realised he loved that girl. Three weeks later they met

and there was great rejoicing in the whole house, for they all wished them well.

"Vassitza, you are all my life," said the girl, and cried for joy in her husband's arms. So he cried also, and from their union began a life of quiet work and love. Nada looked at him with adoring eyes; she was a rather pretty girl under thirty. She used to watch him coming home from the office and on seeing him she would exclaim:

"Here is our old Vassitza," and the neighbours somehow got into the way of waiting for him with her.

And good humour came back as in years gone by, but he was not really changed. Sometimes his melancholy would return, but this he did not show to his wife.

"He is as strong and as healthy as a rock," said Nada one day to another woman who had inquired about Vassitza's health. "If only he could leave that cursed office it would be better still."

Then followed the hard winter, snow fell ceaselessly till everything was buried in its white mantle, cold winds swept the half-dark streets and Vassitza began his night writing again by the light of a small lamp, and when he started coughing Nada nursed him, cooked him maize porridge and covered his feet with a woollen shawl. With the melting of the snows there came great floods and the willow leaves began sprouting on the Danube's banks and again merry voices were to be heard in the sunshine and life woke up again.

"Next Sunday we will go to Kijevo for the whole day," said Nada to her neighbours, standing at the house door with a broom in her hand. "Vassitza needs a good rest and a day in the sunshine, and Kijevo is just the place for him, it's a real paradise."

Kijevo was but the beginning; they spent their following Sundays in Rakovitza and Kozar, they lay on the grass, she singing to him whilst preparing their meals and he listened to her voice, thinking of their happy life. Sometimes he fancied he saw Steve coming to them and wishing them a life of joy and content. Once, there was a ten-year-old child romping about and shouting gaily as he played at horses with his little sister.

"Vassitza, Vassitza!" came a voice from behind him, and

Vassitza turned round. It was the mother calling her child—his name was also "Vassitza"—and he remembered how his own mother used to call him in days gone by and he thought: "How far away that all is!" He closed his eyes and thought of his mother and saw himself again a little child.

On opening them again he saw his dear wife standing before him and he wondered at the strange sadness that swept over him. . . .

One September night when the full moon was shining in the sky, Nada woke up with a start. Vassitza was sitting up in his bed, looking straight in front of him and pointing to some imaginary spot with his finger. His face was ghastly white, his eyes bulging with a wonderful light in them and she heard him saying:

"No, sir, you are not a proper man, you ought to be sent to prison, the country is going to the dogs because there are too many people like you. Do you think you'll buy me? Me! ! Go out of the office at once!"

"Vasso, Vassitza darling," cried Nada in terror, "sign yourself, my treasure, it's only a nightmare you've been having, a mere dream, that's all!"

He looked at her as if he were looking into black space, then he lay down again and said:

"He thinks he is a boss, well he's not!" At length he fell asleep, but Nada kept awake all night and cried like a little girl.

What had made such a terrible impression on him she could not understand.

Vassitza pined away more and more; and in two days he became so weak that he could not get up, and when his wife asked him what was the matter he always answered: "Nothing, sweetheart, nothing! It's only a pity for you, you have got to lie next to me."

The third day, Nada could bear it no longer and she sent for a doctor.

"Nada, please darling," said Vassitza in a weak voice, "send somebody to the office and tell them I can't come; ask them to send someone to me; I've got something very serious to communicate."

The doctor came, shook his head and said Vassitza's case was a curious one. He added also that the patient's nerves were all wrong; he was very run down and had probably had a shock of some sort. The next day Vassitza had high fever. He could only hold Nada's hand and look wistfully into her eyes. In the evening he said he felt better and tried to get up but could not. He kept looking at the door and saying things one could not understand, as if he were speaking in some unknown tongue. Then he suddenly fell back on the cushions, hung his head and gently died.

"Vassitza, my own darling," cried Nada weeping, "I'll die if you leave me; oh, my sweetheart, why have you forsaken me . . ."

It was a bright, warm day, when the coffin passed the neighbouring houses on the way to the cemetery. All the neighbours followed with their eyes and some wiped a tear. "That's poor Vassitza," they said. "He has gone, too."

And when his wife came back from the cemetery it seemed to her that everything was empty, sad and forsaken in their house and yard. Only the moon shone ever brightly over the low roofs. Somewhere in the sky she heard a solitary rook croak.

THE GOLDEN STAIRCASE

By ANDREJS UPITIS

EMployee TILLERS knocked at the door of the Stationmaster's Assistant and stuck his head inside:

"Mr. Kreizbergs, Zarrins sends word that number 36 is signaled out of Laujene."

The Stationmaster's Assistant did not even turn his head. He stood, his hands on the table, twirling mechanically his cap, which lay upside down, his lips firmly joined together, gazing at his wife.

The wife threw a furious look at Tillers, let her half-fastened shoe be, rose, and wrapped a shawl round her bare shoulders.

Tillers, somewhat embarrassed, withdrew. One could only see his hand, with its unclean, black-smeared fingers, on the edge of the door.

"Excuse me . . . but there are a lot of people at the ticket office window today, and we cannot get through with them."

Kreizbergs still gazed at his wife; yet he answered:

"Is Sausum not in the office?"

"He has no key."

Mechanically again, Kreizbergs took his hand away from the cap and felt in his waistcoat pocket, where he kept the key to the ticket cupboard.

"All right! I'll come immediately. Tell Rosenthal to let down the semaphore."

"Already done. Mr. Sausum will probably travel too."

The door had hardly closed again when Mrs. Kreizbergs bent down again to continue to lace up her shoe. Her elegant, uncommonly white hands seemed, in the bluish morning light, to glide out from under the cloth. Her leg with half-bent knee balanced slightly, causing the silken petticoat to rustle. The heavy bundles of deep yellow hair inclined from the back of her neck on to her well formed throat.

The half-open shawl only partially wrapped the full breasts. Through the network of the shawl, one could see the white glimmer of her shoulders.

Presently she threw this off over her back onto the floor, rose and trod, as if trying on her shoes, first on one foot, then on the other, with such deliberation that the yellow leather crackled drily. The yellow, transparent stockings sat on the well turned legs as if glued on. In proportion to the comfortable upper body, her feet seemed wonderfully light and graceful.

The Stationmaster's Assistant sighed, whereat his wife looked at him mockingly.

"What are you sighing for like a calf? You were probably drinking together again yesterday?"

Kreizbergs shook his head.

"You know well enough I have no money."

"Yes, I know that. But that does not prevent you borrowing from Sarrinsh, or from this very Tillers. Plenty of these fellows about. I reckon I smelled traces of brandy about this morning."

Kreizbergs' eyes winked shyly.

The memory of what had happened that morning when he had got home was irksome; he had tried to caress her, and she had angrily ordered him to bed.

"Borrowing . . . I suppose you will hold that once—oh, well, let's say twice—up to me to the end of my life!"

"To the end of your life! Dear me, how tragic!"

She laughed out loud and turned her back on her husband. His persistent looks annoyed her; as if he had just fallen in love with her, or a week or so after the wedding. The man gazed at her as if she were the statue of a saint.

He took up his cap, but merely turned it right side up and placed it on the table again.

"You are going away again?"

She replied ill-temperedly, while stretching out her arms in front of the looking glass:

"I have already told you I am going to Aljia's."

"Always to Aljia's. How often does she come to visit you?"

"How can she come when she has a small child in the house? But you will stand there talking away till the train is there."

Kreizbergs put on his cap and waited till his wife had drawn back from the cupboard. He wriggled in front of the glass, stroking his red hair smooth behind his ears, the while she looked on with an ironical smile and a shrug of the shoulders, as if to say: "Such a fool! Titivates himself like a woman!"

He was still hesitating. Apparently, he wanted to kiss her. But she purposely bent her head again and busied herself with her powder puff.

"You will come back by the number 19?"

She had opened the cupboard door and only her back was to be seen. Her petticoat rustled in tantalising fashion.

"Probably. But if we go to Birks, I will take number 24."

"But that is late in the evening. What are you going to do the whole day long?"

To this she could give no answer. One could hear outside a noise like the rapidly increasing roar of an approaching train. The Stationmaster's Assistant rushed out. She left the cupboard without taking anything from it, sent another ironical look after her husband and again shrugged her shoulders. Calls himself an experienced railwayman, and does not know the difference between the noise of a train and that of a passing cart!

Then the irony vanished from her expression. She listened intently until the rattle of the cart had drowned the foot-steps of her husband and cast a quick look over her hands, skirt and feet, as if seeking to discover what had attracted his attention. What could it have been? There was nothing there. Yet she felt a slight nervous tension. It vexed her, like a child.

After shutting the door, she took out a carefully hidden key and unlocked the lower drawer of the chest of drawers. She chose a pair of dark violet garters with vivid rosettes at the sides and put them on, drawing them well over her knees. Then she fetched out a bottle of rare perfume and sprinkled her blouse and linen. Round her throat she fastened a medallion with a little diamond in the center.

Then she closed the drawer, locked it and hid the key again carefully. Her hands were trembling with agitation and her heart was beating fast; her eyes had acquired a keener luster and there were carmine spots on her cheeks. But the look of exaltation disappeared again as she stood in the middle of the room and cast a contemptuous glance over the shabby appearance of the place. Her husband's bed still in disorder; hanging on a nail on the wall, a pair of his worn-out and torn trousers. A piece of black bread and a plate with the remains of sausages gave the whole room a smack of some sour-reeking barracks.

She slammed the door angrily and stepped out in the fresh air. The train was not yet visible on the line. On the platform, Stationmaster Sausum was striding up and down in a new coat and resplendent plush cap. His beautifully polished boots resounded smartly on the grey, smooth slabs. The white revers with red button was prominent on his sleeve when, with an elegant sweep, he took off his cap. He shook hands with her heartily, bowed, then looked straight into her eyes.

"You are going to Riga too?"

"No, only to Paurugi, where lives a relative of mine."

"The same you visit so frequently?"

She nodded and studied attentively his handsome, fresh face; then she laughed:

"How do you come to know that?"

"I see it, of course."

"Yes, but how do you know it is a relative I so often go to visit?"

"Is that not a matter of indifference? Perhaps Kreizbergs has been talking. All of us here are interested in your movements."

"Thanks! I really don't know what I have done to deserve this interest."

"Look at yourself in a mirror and you will soon know."

She did not quite know how to react to this compliment. For safety's sake, she put on a stern, serious expression, sticking out her chest the while more than ever.

"You are talking rubbish, just like a kid. Yet you are Stationmaster and our superior."

"Oh, what's that? The only effective superiors are pretty women."

The train was now visible on the line, half a verst away. The earth was beginning to vibrate. Kreizbergs hurried out of the office, with a worried, tired face. He nodded to his wife and bent over the side of the platform, looking at the approaching train. Then he ran back, nodding again and shouting something or other.

Whatever it was, she did not hear it. With her back to Sausum, her neat shoes beating time on the stone, distilling a sweet scent around her, she stood on the platform edge, waiting for the train. She had a very pleasing impression that every man in the station, workman or would-be gentleman, was looking at her approvingly.

Even those who rushed out of the train to visit the refreshment room turned around to look at her. Then Kreizbergs reappeared at the office door, craning his neck and trying to meet her eye. She hastened into the train. For some reason she did not herself quite understand, she had no wish these strangers should see her in company with her husband.

A minute or two before the train left, Sausum appeared in her compartment. He must have noticed where she had taken her seat.

Now Sausum was on the whole not unsympathetic to her. She had long ago noticed his inclination to pay her marked attention, but today she felt he was really a trifle too obtrusive. Perhaps the man might have some idea of playing the spy! She looked him straight in the eyes:

"Sure you have not made a mistake? You usually travel second, don't you?"

"For your sake I would travel on the buffers."

"Very well then, go ahead."

"Perhaps it is disagreeable to you to have me sit here?"

"Oh, why so much talk? We were only joking—and you were the first to start."

Sausum quieted down and began to talk. He said nothing in particular, but it was pleasing to see how hard he was trying to make himself agreeable and amusing. She opened the collar of her cloak so he could see her décolleté chest

and the little diamond medallion. She laughed at his pointless jokes, casting an occasional superficial glance at the two strangers who were sitting opposite her.

Outside, one could see the red cap of the Stationmaster's Assistant bobbing up and down the platform; he was surely moving about in hopes of seeing her at some carriage window. She drew back further into her corner and glanced at Sausum to see whether he too had noticed it. But either he had seen nothing, or he pretended he had not.

Sausum did not stop talking a second during the whole journey to Paurgi. She took her part in the conversation, and laughed copiously, but for all that she experienced secret anxiety. Perhaps he had learned or guessed something. Perhaps he was out to learn more today.

She pretended to be absent-minded and put on a serious air, then rose and looked out of the window.

"We sit here chatting and laughing, and all the while poor Aljia is probably in tears. Her boy was so ill . . ."

"Ah, well, you will soon be there, and will put your hand on him, and he will forthwith be well again."

She hardly heard what he was saying. Full of her thoughts, she answered with the banal sentence that serves on all occasions:

"Think so?"

Probably he took it up wrong, or at least differently. At the moment, he was standing beside her. He groped for her hand and stammered like a schoolboy:

"For sound men as for sick ones . . . your hand . . . it is a magician."

Fortunately she held her bag in her hand; she shoved him slightly aside with her shoulder. There was a whistle and the train came to a standstill.

She hurried towards the exit, hoping it would not occur to him to follow. She jumped down on the platform and looked around. Yes, he too was coming down, was indeed next to her. She made a sharp movement:

"Excuse me, will you? I think Aljia is waiting for me."

"Waiting, is she? Where?"

Quite true; on the entire platform there was only one woman to be seen, a milkwoman with her cans, just strug-

gling up into the train. She blushed and felt annoyed:
"Not here . . . but I think, over there, by the pine trees . . ."

There were a few people there, also a cab or two. Sausum craned his neck. Surely this man is out to spy. . . . She turned her back on him and fastened her coat collar.

"May I not accompany you?"

"Thanks, no, you may not."

She stamped her foot lightly and turned away. She was so angry that tears came to her eyes. The impertinent wretch! What is he thinking about?

She went out of the station, along the sandy path, over a stile, past three villas. Then only, did she slow down and look cautiously around. He had not followed her. A good thing he had some sense of shame!

After proceeding a good bit further to the first sand hill, she resumed her composure to a certain extent. After all, there was no call to be so angry; he was quite a nice boy. And apparently hopelessly in love with her. Such devotion is always impressive. Only a pity he was so open about it and pressed his attentions at the wrong time and place. But there is no harm in such exciting little incidents; without them, life would be too monotonous.

Every journey to Aljia is bound up with some romantic adventure that flavours memory and helps to bear up with Kreizbergs' everlasting sighs, sad looks and brandy breath.

She was drawn out of her study by the sight of a stranger who stood at the door of a villa and looked round him. When he saw her, he took off his hat with a comical gesture:

"Please tell me whether this is Smiltniek's villa."

"Yes, it is. You have some business there? He lives in Riga, you know."

Hardly had she uttered the words when she realised their folly. Why should she tell an utterly strange man that she knew someone here and was well posted on his doings? She attempted to correct her mistake by adding:

"A relative of mine lives hereabouts . . ."

But he had already lifted his hat and was going off. Again she was overwhelmed with a sense of her folly; what

business had she to talk to a strange man whom she saw for the first time. How very stupid and impulsive she was!

As she was pulling the bell, a dog jumped out of a bush. He barked loudly, but, after smelling through the hedge, wagged his tail. Aljia was coming out of the little house, buttoning up her jacket as she walked. While she was opening the gate, she kept looking at her visitor with a slightly ironical smile, as was her habit. She seemed to be in no hurry at all. Mrs. Kreizbergs had to look away and begin the conversation herself.

Truth to tell, Aljia's behaviour had lately become very queer. She knew too much, and she let you notice she did. As a relative and a friend she had ever been prone to jealousy and envy. One could not depend on her silence; perhaps the people round about already knew things. That in itself is sufficiently suspicious, that she shows such slowness in letting her in. She even stopped at the door of the house:

"Look at these white asters. I used to see them in florists' windows in Riga. They are supposed to be a very rare kind that does not flower every summer."

The asters were really fine, but was it such an important matter? She must have some intention in speaking thus. Perhaps some inquisitive woman is peeping through the hedge. . . .

She hastened to enter the house, which was small enough, consisting as it did of one room and a kitchen.

The baby lay in the cot and was making great efforts to shove its toes in its mouth. It was making a low, contented noise like a pigeon, and did not take the slightest notice of the visitor. Like most childless women, Mrs. Kreizbergs did not interest herself in children. She tickled it lightly with her finger tips, out of politeness, and asked how it was getting on.

To Aljia, as to all nineteen-year-old mothers, her child was the greatest thing in the world. Or perhaps this was not the case, and she merely launched out into this voluble discourse about the baby with some other intention. She followed this up by an equally long and rambling speech

about her husband and her household affairs. Not a single word did she utter about the purpose of the visit.

However, one must listen and drop a word here and there. Aljia was well informed and could talk. Besides, only through her good offices had the acquaintance with . . .

During her relative's long-drawn remarks, she managed to throw frequent looks out of the tiny window onto the villa. On the first suitable occasion, she enquired:

"Has Smiltniek come?"

"Two hours ago."

They were gazing in opposite directions. The visitor had bent down and was arranging something about her stocking, while Aljia was busying herself about the baby. When Mrs. Kreizbergs lifted her head, her cheeks were redder than usual. She could not get accustomed to it. . . . But perhaps it was the same with all women. Perhaps one never got accustomed to it at all.

Aljia started off on another topic in a different tone:

"There was quite a large party here last Sunday."

"Yes? He has so many relatives."

"They were not exactly relatives. Two students and about four ladies. They drank and sang the whole night long. It took me till noon the next day to get finished with the bottles and dishes alone. Twice during the night, my husband had to go out for more beer."

She had some difficulty in hiding from her relation how this was hurting her. She gave a forced laugh:

"Yes, he loves gaiety. He has often told me so."

But Aljia did not take her eyes off her visitor for a single moment now.

"One of them was some sort of a dancer, or a singer. Looked like one out of the swell restaurants. The other played the piano, but this one did nothing but twist herself about in the middle of the room. And then there was always applause and hurrah shoutings. She was carried shoulder high, and all sorts of things. Such a rumpus!"

The visitor rose and buttoned up her coat as if she had far to go. She went rapidly through the garden, winding her way between the flower beds and bushes. The villa with its two rows of windows was smiling welcomingly.

Her heart began to beat faster. One of the curtains was moving slightly. She could never enter here without emotion.

The bronze bell sounded softly under the pressure of her hand. The massive oaken door opened heavily, noiselessly. A red plush carpet strip led between the white, carved Ionic columns, up the five steps. On this soft rug, footsteps seemed to die out, and the whole body to acquire a rare, elastic grace.

But here he was in person, coming to meet her, tall and elegant, in a white vest and wonderfully shiny boots.

She felt the pressure of his soft, heavily be ringed hand; it was a strong, warm handshake, and sent a tingle right through her. Then his lips touched lightly the back of her hand, her finger-tips that lay clustered together in his palm.

He led her through the red door, beyond the antechamber, into the drawing room. One corner of the room was entirely occupied by a dark brown divan in the shape of a half circle, over which two palm trees spread their fanshaped leaves. On the chimneypiece, a glass sphere shed light over the clock, a gilded affair, a group of hunters, hounds and deer. . . . All familiar, oft seen objects. But they pleased her every time afresh; it gave her satisfaction to steep her eyes in this ocean of wealth, luxury and beauty.

The man had taken off his visitor's hat and unbuttoned her cloak. Now he could kiss her properly, on the lips first, then, bending back her head, the dimples on her neck. That too, she was used to, and loved. He whispered in her ear:

"Mrs. Kreizbergs, dear Mrs. Kreizbergs . . . how good it is that you have come!"

She smiled. It was an odd trick of his at times to call her Mrs. Kreizbergs and to address her in a formal way.

She slipped away from him and arranged her hair in front of the glass. And she saw with what lovelorn eyes he was contemplating her hands. In the well polished glass the diamonds on his fingers and the mother of pearl buttons of his waistcoat flashed gaily. He seemed paler than usual, which made his moustache appear darker.

Then they sat down together on the divan, she leaning back in the corner, a trifle more boldly perhaps than convention allows. But she knew he liked that. He had one arm round her waist and, with his other hand, was stroking the edge of her sleeve. The clock ticked on quietly. Through the open window a light breeze was blowing in, gently disturbing the palms. It was good to be there, wonderful. . . .

They never spoke much. She accounted for this by the belief that they loved each other too passionately for words. Love has no use for noise. Hearts speak loudest in repose and solitude. Here there reigned a marvelous peace in contrast to the dusty, full, noisy station.

His thoughts seemed to be wandering tonight; he had to seek for words. Laying his hand on her knee, he looked her in the face.

"I saw you coming through the door, and could not await your arrival. You stayed an eternity with your relative today."

"I cannot get away from her when she once starts talking. She has become such a chatterbox, and then, she was so queer . . . I don't know what is the matter with her."

He showed but little interest in the subject.

"What should be the matter with her?"

"I have no idea. She is either envious or jealous of me."

He smiled.

"Well, let her. What does it signify?"

But she was concerned, and she turned her head away.

"I am so afraid lest she start blabbing. She knows everything."

"Does that signify very much? But if you—I could arrange things differently. We might meet elsewhere."

She protested vigorously against this.

"No, nowhere else. I have grown accustomed to this place; it is so beautiful and quiet here. It is so strange—I don't suppose you can understand it—but I feel here as if I were in my very own home. You know, you are my real husband, and Kreizbergs—well, I don't truly know what to call Kreizbergs. And will not try. My existence there is merely an act of waiting on the next time here.

It is a cross to me. When I leave here I feel five years younger, so light and happy is my mood."

A sly smile played like lightning round his lips, and vanished while he adapted himself to her sentimental humour.

"I forget what poet it was who wrote that Love is a Golden Staircase on which hearts climb into heaven. We are in heaven here. When you return there, you go down to earth again."

Her intoxication fed and waxed on this food. She whispered ecstatically:

"How wonderfully you can put it. In heaven . . . up a golden staircase . . . yes, my heaven is here. Would I never had to get down to earth again!"

"Why don't you come oftener?"

"If I but could! You don't know what a job I have. You are a free agent, and yet even you cannot always come."

He retorted with a touch of resignation.

"Well, everybody has his troubles."

He let his eyes wander over the room with a curious expression, as if to make sure everything was still in its place. He seemed to have grown still more serious.

"What troubles have you got? Tell me."

"What good would that do? You would probably not understand them anyway. You know I have business and enterprises of various kinds; they don't always go the way they should—generally the reverse."

"Oh, I forgot—a little while ago, there was a man at the gate, and he asked me whether this was your villa."

This apparently trivial occurrence seemed to put him in a great state of excitement.

"A man? What did he want here? What did he look like?"

But of this she had no clear recollection; she had paid no particular attention to him. She had had her own pre-occupations. . . . She could not help thinking this agitation was odd.

"Are you afraid it may have been some one looking out for an opportunity to rob you? One hears of such dreadful things nowadays. I have the impression that it was

rather me they were after, I mean, that they are spying on us. But I have no idea from what quarter it can be. Kreizbergs is much too stupid and unimaginative to do such a thing."

"No, no, it is not that. You need have no fears on that score. And Aljia will not talk. She has quite a good time in my service and will not risk her situation for a bagatelle."

After that, he remained very absorbed. He did not recover his spirits till they had gone into another room, where the decoration was all blue and gold. There was an atmosphere of æsthetic joy and bliss here; she reflected it was like floating somewhere between light, sun-laden clouds, high up in the sky. With soft steps she walked through the room, threw her head back sensuously, shut her eyes and laughed.

"Here indeed, is heaven. But where is the golden staircase?"

"Come, we will seek it together."

And he led her into the dining room, where she busied herself with the silver and the glass. She blushed with pleasure at the cool feel of the precious metal in her hands and the sparkle of the cut glass before her eyes. This was always one of her happy moments. For one whole hour she played here at being the real housewife and owner. It evoked long-forgotten dreams, or perhaps it was that she had transmuted life into a dream.

He encouraged her to drink and drank himself. She was not keen about it but forced herself to drink. He was right in his way, for when sober she was always a little shy and helpless. Whether it was proper and seemly thus to drink she knew not; but she wanted above all to please this man, who was the owner of all this wealth and these fine things. She wanted to captivate him, to intoxicate him with herself, to bind him to her so that he would never leave her . . . to become the real mistress here and steep herself forever in all this beauty.

After her fifth glass of liqueur, when she began to feel a little giddy, she slid from his lap and sat down opposite him.

"I believe there were great doings here last Sunday?"

"Where did you hear that? Well, never mind. It was nothing special, just a few acquaintances who came along."

"Ladies, too . . . who was the dancer?"

"Just a dancer, like all other dancers. Are you jealous? Rubbish! These creatures come and go, but you remain the One and Only."

"Forever?"

He put his hand on his heart with a tragi-comedy gesture: "Forever!"

And he stretched out his hands to her and drew her to him again.

After that they went upstairs into the Flower Room, where one single window occupied about one-fifth of the wall space. The scent of the flowers went to her head even more than the drink had done. He had lain down on a fur rug, his head leaning on her knees and clasping her legs in his arms. That, too, went a little against the grain, she felt, as drinking had, downstairs. But what was she to do? One must take things as they come; this must be the golden staircase on which she was to climb into heaven. . . .

So she stared into the flowery horizon and let his hair glide slowly through her fingers.

Towards evening they went out for a walk along the seashore. One could not see the little gate on the other side of the yard for the growth in front. But they were both a trifle light-headed yet and paid no attention to the possibility of being seen by acquaintances. Things seemed bigger, vaster out here than during the season. Over the sea and the sand-hills and the stony shore, an intimate, romantic solitude reigned. Both the wanderers were somewhat tired; they kept close to each other, and their hands did not unclasp for a single moment.

"How splendid it would be if we were both to get into a boat and sail away . . . no, not there, for that is our coast of Courland. But further, I mean . . . to Sweden, Denmark, Italy . . . would that not be great?"

She clung yet closer to him, but she protested nevertheless.

"Why? Is it not beautiful enough here?"

"Where is the beauty here? In these bleak sand-hills? In the fishermen with their oily smell? In these abandoned villas?"

"Yours is not abandoned anyway. It is fine, with its soft armchairs, costly dishes, pictures, flowers . . ."

The breath almost gave out as she plunged into the sea of memory and lived it all over again.

But he collected himself, and frowned slightly:

"Sure you don't love all these things better than you love me?"

She felt offended and broke off the conversation.

"Don't talk nonsense."

"Forgive me. I did not mean it in that way. But I have today such a queer feeling . . . troubles and annoyances. But why bother you with them? Besides, I have been reflecting over what you were saying a while back. You have to seek me out secretly and take all sorts of precautions. You have got to make yourself agreeable to Aljia and the Lord knows whom, and blush before your husband."

"I do it all with joy. Besides, I have got quite good at it, and find it no longer hard."

"But I do. I cannot bear to sit quietly at home while you have to go through all that. Especially when I think how very different it could be—we could be together quite openly and never separate. Would that not be much finer?"

She snuggled against him and assented softly:

"Yes, yes . . . it would be wonderful. But it is not possible."

"Why not? Merely because of this confounded property that holds us apart, for the sake of which I must endure all sorts of disagreeable things, which keeps me in a certain set and you in another. If I were once rid of it, it would become possible. Think what a life that would be! Neither of us need slink ashamedly on to our golden staircase; we could walk up proudly, like a pair of sovereigns."

Still closer did she cling.

"Yes . . . yes . . . go on. How beautifully you talk!"

When they got home again, there was only another half hour left. She rushed once more through all the rooms,

with covetous eyes, as if she could take away with her an intangible something of it all. He was waiting for her again at the five steps, in ill-humour once more, but towards her full of love and tenderness.

"Don't come with me. Remain here. You can see me all the way from the window."

But his eyes were full of tears.

"Come again! Don't forget me!"

Forget? As if a single day here did not outweigh a whole week in the station barracks. In her inmost self she laughed over his ingenuousness and his great love, and almost ran to the gate.

She turned round, a thing she had never done on previous occasions, and saw him standing at the window, and threw him a kiss.

She felt quite proud of her courage. The more so as two women were just drawing near. Let them see, let them think what they will! What matters the envy of the world as compared with the happiness that is hers this day?

As the train lumbered in, she noticed a plush cap at a carriage window. On no account did she want to see Sausum now, so she hastened on, so as to get into the train as far from him as possible. There she squeezed herself into a corner of an empty coach and forthwith shut her eyes.

Was it the compartment that was rocking, or herself? Doubtless a bee has much the same sensation on returning to its hive from flying over the flowered meadows. All the memories of that day were rushing through her blood; love tingled in every nerve and stung in every member.

All they had said this day ran past her ears with the sound of many waters. She did not want to think, to analyse, to reflect, merely to let herself go with the stream of her emotions. For the first time she realised how fond she was of this man who had opened to her the portals of a world of beauty and wealth. Yes, she would go with him over the seas to the world's ends. Let him only call to her! And he will call . . . she felt he would. . . .

Out of the flood of memory she stepped out onto her

prosaic station. Where Sausum had sprung from, heaven only knew, but there he was, lifting his cap and bowing:

"Well, how did you get on? How is your relation's baby? Could I not accompany you?"

"Thanks. No. I could not think of it."

A fine companion! Just now, when she had brought so much, oh, so very much, away from there . . . she was sufficient unto herself, all else was irksome, disturbing.

The temporary station building, with its sweaty window panes and its ragged roof one could reach with one's hands, seemed as if it had been flattened out against the ground. And behind it, the barracks, the habitation of the staff. To enter that is like creeping into hell.

She stopped purposely on the platform, although the rush of the passengers disturbed her. Then Kreizbergs came out of the office. Again he craned his neck and stared—straight at her, of course. What else could one expect? She went away at once.

From the doorway she fancied she could get the repulsive, sour, barracks-like smell; the opening of the door wafted it full into her face. She lit the lamp and looked savagely round the room. On the table, a lump of black bread and a plate with sausage remains! Her husband's bed unmade, in disorder, just as when she had left that morning. Hanging on the wall, the torn trousers. . . . Apparently Kreizbergs had not been in since. He never went home during his hours on duty, but took his meals at the station restaurant and to rest stretched out on a chair in the office.

The thing now was to undress quickly. On the departure of the train he was off duty and would come home immediately. She was wearing one or two things he was not to see. Not that she feared him, but simply because that was her secret. To part from these scented, intoxicating articles of clothing, these glittering jewels, brought tears to her eyes. It seemed like tearing from her body something that belonged to it irrevocably.

She saw her reflection in the mirror, half-naked and quite aged. She grabbed her old, ordinary clothes savagely and flung them on. Behind the door she could already hear Kreizbergs' footsteps and his shy cough.

He was coming home from his daily work, tired out, dragging his feet. Today he even had his spectacles on, which made him look older and sillier somehow. She was sitting on the bed and not looking at her husband, yet nothing escaped her; she mentally compared and contrasted him with the man who ever filled her memory. This was no man at all. The mere caricature of a man. His chin stubbly with a ten-days' growth. Two deep lines across the forehead. The lips sewn tightly together as if he had chronic toothache. Unclean nails. She jumped up and wanted to undress. Then she stopped and reflected. Goodness only knew what he would not get into his head. She got into bed as she was and drew the cover up to the chin.

"Please don't make such a noise. I have a headache."

Of course she had no headache, but what harm is there in a little lie? He himself was the cause of it, through being so silly, so stupid, so ugly.

He was just taking off his boots, and asked all sorts of questions about Aljia. She answered in monosyllables. But he was used to that, and thought nothing of it. He almost spoke with himself, putting a question and answering it. She thought of the other man, who knew how to be interesting in his questions, and poetical in his answers.

Kreizbergs had trod on something. He bent down and picked it up; it was one of her fine garters. A light shudder went down her back; he would question her now, and she would have to reply. What should she say? There will be a scandal . . . the first in their common existence . . . awful, yet fascinating; how would it be?

"Where have you got a thing like that from?"

Yes, the very thing she had expected. She saw him holding the pretty thing in his clumsy, avid fingers, turning it in his hand, and smiling. That commonplace, idiotic smile!

In a twinkling all fear had vanished. This man was content with an empty shell. She turned her head icily, proudly:

"So it is only now you notice it? What are you pawing it for, with your filthy fingers? Lay it down."

She drew the cover over her head, that he might no longer disturb her pleasant fatigue, her sweet remembrance.

The days passed by, grey as they always were after such an episode. As a rule they were speedily interrupted by a new rendezvous and the preparations for it; thus she lived in a perpetual state of traveling fever, as some one at a small station, waiting to proceed a stage further into unfamiliar country. But this time a week passed, two weeks passed, and there was no news from the seaside. She could not stand it any longer, and went uninvited.

The gate was closed and the shutters of the lodge were up. No leaves on the trees; nipped by the frost, the fronds of the grasses were curling up. There were great pools of water on the sandy roads. . . .

Fighting down her tears, she sat for hours on the deserted platform waiting for the return train. She wanted to burst into tears in the compartment, but had to forbear because of what strangers would think. At home, Kreizbergs hovered near her incessantly, and Sausum greeted her from afar, being apparently somewhat huffed. The inferior officials and the passers-by looked at her with laughing eyes, wishing her all manner of good things. And ever, from morning till night, that barracks-like smell behind four walls. . . .

Queer, stupid, despairing thoughts seized hold of her. She would stand on the platform and see the train thunder and spark and the wheels dance on the rails, then turn disgustedly away. She had no courage left. Life seemed a terribly sad business. She had lived so little and had dreamed so much. No, this could not, should not be the end; the instinct of life was far too strong in her vigorous young body.

About the man yonder, she had waves of contradictory feelings. There were moments when he appeared to her as the most abandoned and cruel of deceivers; at such times she would become unbearably irritable. Kreizbergs, especially, hardly dared come near her then, and Sausum fled with a sigh of resignation when he saw her coming. At other moments kinder thoughts invaded her, and she bathed herself in sweet memories of the villa by the sea. She forced herself into that wonderful world of which the articles in her secret drawer reminded her. Like a child, she played

with the pretty things and glowed with craving for the past.

Forget she could not. It was surely impossible that he should have deserted her deliberately. Something must be holding him back. She tried a hundred guesses, but, every time she thought she held the key to the mystery, she threw it away again and plunged into another period of bitter-sweet expectation. She met every train, and when it had gone, stood there quite dazed and looked at it disappearing. The station officials noticed her and made all sorts of ambiguous remarks, Sausum among the first. Kreizbergs, profoundly disturbed, discussed things behind her back and thus compromised her yet further. But she cared nothing.

None of these people, nothing in this existence, had any importance for her now. They were shadow pictures, ghost shapes. Only one thing stood out clearly in her consciousness; something unique, rich, beautiful.

Sometimes when the night train was due, she would get up suddenly out of her sleep and go out half dressed. If Kreizbergs happened to be on duty on these occasions, he would run about wildly on the platform till all the other officials started laughing at him. But if he happened to be off, he slept so soundly that he never heard anything. The next morning, however, he would be sure to meet somebody who would tell him all about it. Being naïve and stupid, he would start contradicting and denying, making things infinitely worse in the process. He was greatly affected by his wife's bad reputation. He became quite thin, absent-minded, negligent. He would dance about behind her, seeking to persuade her:

"You will catch cold. Come, please get away in again."

But she just looked contemptuously at him, as at the others who were standing by, sneering and watchful.

She had a sore head. Towards evening she had a little sleep, then woke up and tumbled about in the bed sleeplessly. She listened for the coming of the night train, having on this occasion no intention of getting up. After it had gone off again, someone knocked at the door. She recognised the soft voice of Rosental.

"Mrs. Kreizbergs, here is a letter for you."

She had already forgotten the letters she used to receive, so in the first instant she did not reflect that the letter might be from him. She lit the lamp, glanced at the envelope and did not even recognise the handwriting.

She read half of it before the truth dawned on her. Filled with an overmastering, joyful excitement, she started reading it all over again. It was an uncommonly long letter and had seemingly been written hastily, in great agitation. It was difficult to grasp the meaning of individual sentences, but this much was clear, that some tragedy had taken place in his life. He called himself a beggar, ruined and utterly destroyed; he had lost all. The only thing left was his love for her, his craving for her. He called to her, called to her to come to him forever. This was the great moment, when nothing more stood between them, and they could start out together on the life they had always dreamt of. . . .

Whether it was the bad handwriting or the bad news, for some reason she was much quieter and less joyful when she finished reading the letter. Her glowing, romantic desire had become a habit with her, so she was startled and a little afraid for the stark reality she now saw behind the clouds of romance. Then she looked at her husband who was snoring noisily and was perfectly unconscious of the light or of her. And she contrasted the other man with this dull, superfluous creature; the other man, with his white waistcoat with mother of pearl buttons, and beringed fingers, scented, elegant, graceful and attentive.

Warmth crept back into her heart. She knew what she had to do. Till the hour for the noon train she showed herself unusually friendly and chatty with her husband, who consequently almost melted with bliss. The stupid man could not see that this was merely the last reflected glory of the setting sun. He had no premonition that this leave-taking was final.

She felt a twinge of pity for this humble creature as he readily carried her trunk to the station and ran through the train to find her a good seat. For the first time, she remained at the carriage window and smiled at him. She did the same to Sausum, who was standing a little further away.

After all, she had spent four years with these men, and heaven only knew when she would see them again. Heaven, indeed, only knew whither she would travel to with that other man yonder. . . .

There was a touch of sadness in her heart as she leaned back in her seat and looked out the window onto the trees, bitten by the first winter frost. The winter of nature coincided with the spring of her life . . . a curious thing, that. But could she do otherwise? It was fate that had bound her with unbreakable fetters to that man . . . to that fine, good, loving man.

She collected herself and banished care, like a tree in springtime shakes off the sweet bloom from its branches.

She was somewhat surprised when the cabman halted in front of a sorry, little, wooden house, with a poster: Furnished Rooms for Travelers. Could he not have arranged for their first meeting after all this while in some other, pleasanter, more romantic setting than this?

She dragged her trunk up the creaking, wooden staircase. The air here was even worse than in the railway barracks. A bearded Swiss gaped at her from below, with shameless eyes. Upstairs a slatternly old woman was waiting with a bucket and some rags. . . .

He clasped her in his arms and literally tore her through the unclean doorway. She had no time to look around and take in her surroundings; he put her trunk down, took off her cloak and set it on a chair. Nervously, hastily, his fingers wandered over her body, feeling, caressing, quieting.

"So you have come . . . to stay with me?"

"Yes, yes, yes . . ."

She could not think, could not grasp things; what other answer could she give under the stress of this irresistible onslaught of welcoming affection? Once more she was seized by the old excitement. She sank with a tired smile in the armchair and let him caress her.

She had forgotten to take off her goloshes. He knelt down, took them off, cuddled near her and whispered something in her ear. Such devotion and heartiness were new to her; she felt as if she were being balanced on his knees,

rocked in his hands. She wanted to close her eyes, to see nothing, to think of nothing. The tired smile remained on her lips.

Then he sat down close to her and started speaking. She heard his words, but understood little of them. It was just what he had written in the letter, how he had felt the snare get ever closer round him till at one blow all was lost. He had no business left, no villa, no automobile, no money. He had been thrown out onto the street, naked and a beggar. . . . He told her of what he had lived through and suffered, and of the things that still threatened him: the law, prison, and other unfamiliar things. recurred in his tale. He was bereft of all prospects for the future; he had no plans. The only thing left to him was her love, and that had grown a hundredfold. Like a drowning man clings to a floating spar, so did he cling to her.

She listened to him for a long while without moving, without making herself free of him. Then, slowly, gradually, she began to understand what it was he was speaking about. And a wonderful change came over her. From her flight far up among the clouds, she volplaned back to the earth, the cold, raw, bleak earth, where all things were grey and monotonous and repulsive. The smile still lay on her face, but in her soul something strange, unpleasant, was slowly awaking to life.

"You will not go away? You will stay with me?"

"No . . . yes . . ."

The words were out before she had time to reflect what they committed her to. . . . And suddenly she was aware that his arms were round her neck, that his hair was touching her face. She drew away from him with decision, freed herself from this irksome embrace and leaned back. For the first time she looked at him with sober eyes. Was this really he? No elegant clothes, no white waistcoat, no resplendent patent leather boots . . . his chin stubbly with a ten-days' growth . . . two deep lines on the forehead . . . his lips sewn tightly together as if he had chronic toothache . . . fingers with unclean nails . . . a torn jacket with shabby buttons . . . his collar worn and smutty. . . . Where had she seen all this before?

He made another dash at her hands, but she pushed him angrily away and tried to rise. He did not understand and looked round, as if to discover the reason. Then he jumped up:

"I know what it is. You are cold. It is very cold here. These confounded people have neglected to light a fire on the very second day. But I will order something hot at once . . ."

He pushed the button of the electric bell; once, twice, again and again. No one showed up. He seemed near a collapse.

"They will give me nothing more on credit. This morning they actually threatened me with the police. The bloodsuckers! But I will show them! . . . I suppose you have a little money on you?"

He looked sideways at her trunk and went out. She could hear his heavy footsteps creaking on the stairs and dying away. A door banged somewhere.

She rose and glanced round the room. An iron bed with one great woollen cover. A cupboard innocent of mirror, with chipped keyholes. In front of the iron stove a heap of brown paper. On the windows dirty yellowish curtains. The stuffing of the chair moth-eaten. Two empty mugs of beer on the table. . . . What was she doing in such a hole?

She drew herself up, her breast heaving and her eyes full of tears—tears of fury and humiliation. What did he think she was that he should bring her here? What was in his mind?

Something seemed to choke her. She clenched her fists. Asked whether she had money on her, had he? Oh, the impertinence. . . . Yes, she had money: for her return ticket.

She put on her cloak hastily, and the goloshes, and seized her trunk. In a twinkling she was out of the door, down the stairs, into the street, past the leering Swiss . . . hoped he would not follow her . . . from such a man one might expect anything.

She espied from afar a policeman at the corner of the street and decided to shout for assistance if he should

attempt to follow her. And he did follow her. Only, he was too slow about it. She was already in the train and did not see him being held back by the officials at the gate, throwing looks of despair at her as her carriage window glided by.

It was only now she saw clearly how deeply he had offended and humiliated her. He was a beggar, in rags, and perfectly shameless in the bargain! He had not even enough money to pay for that wretched room. The law, the police, prison, threatened him. And he had dared to write to her, to talk to her, to imagine heaven only knew what! And had not a single impulse of shame. . . .

What she had suffered during the long days of waiting mingled queerly with the impressions of this day. A deceiver, a rogue . . . he had played with her right along. Her great love had been mocked in the basest fashion. She was angry with him, with herself, with her incredible folly. The very multitude of conflicting emotions, and the duration of the journey alone contributed to soothing her down somewhat.

Kreizbergs was on duty that day. He was waiting for the train and hastened to help his wife to get out. Her fury had abated, but her husband was as repulsive to her as ever. She pushed him irritably aside as he bent down, probably to kiss her, in his joy at seeing her again.

"None of that . . . here, where everybody can see. . . . Take the trunk and put it away."

Even that contented him. He dragged the trunk into the office where he had a lot to do pending the departure of the train.

She remained on the platform, reluctant to reënter these mouldy barracks. What was she to do now? There was nothing left for her to think, to dream about. This rogue had robbed her of all, had destroyed it all. What should she do, in this wilderness she was so utterly sick of?

The trees in the public garden were waving in the moonlight, and she looked in that direction. Should she not go for a little walk . . .? Suddenly Sausum stood before her. Her smile on her departure had probably remained imprinted on his memory.

"May I come with you?"

She looked at him straight in the eyes and laughed invitingly:

"Thank you. Why not? Come along . . ."

And she took his arm of her own accord.

THE PINK ASS

By JANIS EJERINS

THE merry children of this world are wont to talk of the cafés and bars to which Fate introduced them in their youth and from which, after a time, it ejected them with the first line of care on their foreheads—that little, coffin-like line that is the first sign of a burial of our youth. Some compare these places with the treacherous rocks on which sirens sing and let no mariner sail by; others to the Divina Commedia, that Montmartre of former times, where each journey begins with Hell to end up with Heaven. He who has tasted of this experience has little to learn afresh in Riga, that typical city of the post-war period. Of all the follies of the big world, you will find in Riga only a pale and unattractive reflection. Married women and maids can safely let their husbands and lovers depart, well knowing they will return to them unharmed after a few hours' absence. For the temptations of this city are grey and tasteless, its sins are drab, its drinking dens are dull. They do not even attempt to justify themselves by some artistic enterprise. All the greater is the confidence of the hosts in the stupidity of their guests: it is so great indeed, that they leave little material for pulpit condemnation. The barkeepers of Riga have become the most effective helpers of the local clergy.

Yet, there was one exception: the "Pink Ass," a café that supplied half the work of that section of the police whose duty it is to watch over public morals. The little wooden house in the so-called Garden Quarter of the city lit up its lamps nightly in their setting of green foliage and poured its inviting light on the passers-by of three streets—on drinkers and teetotallers, on Jews and Christians, on children and grown-ups alike. On rainy, pitch-dark nights, it helped the adherents of the Blue Cross on their way

to their amorous adventures, and with fine impartiality, assisted foreign diplomats in their attempts to think well of the municipal policy of the metropolis.

To be quite frank, one must confess that in those days the "Pink Ass" afforded the only means of street lighting in Riga. Just after the war, the mile-long streets, the whole town indeed, lay in the same hopeless darkness as the City Council. Only here and there the lamps of the cafés threw a streak of light; their only rivals, in painfully inadequate measure, being the weak lanterns of the cabs that wandered aimlessly about in the night, like the twinkling eyes of hunger-driven wolves. If some sardonic soul ventured to observe that it were better to let complete darkness reign than to confide street lighting to the bar lamps, mine host of the "Pink Ass" never failed in hardihood to reply: "We hang out our lights with the double purpose of showing the way hither to those who seek us and the way of escape to those who shun us!"

Not alone by this retort did he show his admirable sense of reigning conditions; his entire establishment furnished convincing evidence. The other bars were as like each other as ten consecutive roars of some well ordered wild animal, but the "Pink Ass" had a character of its own. The host had learned the profound truth, that it is the function of a café to supply those manifold deficiencies of city homes which those who inhabit them must suffer for the sins of those who designed them; so he saw to it that comfort and warmth were always to be had in his place.

On the same principle he had accumulated the most original collection of ladies imaginable. He had been guided in his choice less by regard for æsthetic beauty than by appreciation of some oddity of expression and manner that gave each lady a peculiar personal charm. For it is well known that many prefer this sort of thing to the most regular Grecian profile.

It may be said with truth that, during the difficult aftermath of the war, it was to this idea that the establishment owed its salvation, to this or perhaps more accurately, to one of the ladies: Dulce Vanna.

It is, of course, well known that women and girls who

take the veil abandon their family and baptismal names and on entering the convent, exchange them for another. The same process is frequently undergone by those who take the worldly veil and enter the bar, that chapel of the Devil that boasts of a ritual not wholly dissimilar to the other.

It follows that there is no real foundation for the belief that Dulce Vanna was a distinguished Italian, as might be supposed from her name; in point of fact she was a country bred, though not quite ingenuous girl from Lettgallen, by name Gela, to which a man of some education had in his day added his family patronymic. But this true knight and protector had been reported missing during the world war; she wore mourning for him for over a year. A good Catholic, one may be allowed to wonder slightly that she thereafter preferred the bar to the Carmelite house or a nunnery of some other order.

Doubtless personal taste and temperament play a decisive rôle in such decisions; sorrow may be drowned in wine as effectively as in prayer. It was here; on the kindly suggestion of a carbaret artiste, that she adopted her silly and illogical name.

Although the young widow was permanently in love, she could not be said to have become a worshipper at the shrine of the flesh. Instead of loving one man, she loved that great undefinable something that is called manliness, or rather masculinity. All the clients of the "Pink Ass" were to Dulce merely specimens of this wonderful, inexhaustible masculinity, and from that angle alone did she consider them. She allowed herself no more to fall in love with any individual specimen than a man who greatly admires some business firm would dream of falling in love with one of its representatives. In this way she testified to her respect for the memory of her late husband, and the policy represented from another point of view a precious asset for a *grisette*, for it preserved her from the temptation of foolish individual adventures. At times when her colleagues would wax furiously excited over some man or other she would remain quietly seated, and only became spurred to attention if a newcomer showed signs of pedantry—worthy of her interest. But when she did rise, the whole place awakened

up, applause rang from every table and a murmur of "unsurpassable" ran round.

In an odd way she represented the heart of the café, through the heavy beats of which the life blood was pumped through the whole body of the place.

There are days when bleak winds blow and cold rain whips through the streets, and on such evenings there were seldom enough guests in the "Pink Ass." The "ladies" sat and wearied on the stools, eagerly watching each opening of the door—though, to be sure, these were mostly due to the exit of clients driven out by a desire for sleep or a penury of cash. It was on just such an autumn evening that a belated, middle-aged guest appeared at the "Pink Ass." He required much persuasion before he would take off his overcoat; then he took a seat, ordered a flagon of spirits and some swiss cheese and settled down to a slow drinking and listening to the howling of the wind in the outer darkness. Although the place was nearly empty, the ladies paid no attention to him: he looked too commonplace. But when, half an hour later, he signified a desire for Dulce Vanna's company, she did not refuse, but sat down at his table with imperturbable gravity.

"Care for a glass of wine?"

"Thank you, Sir, I should," answered Dulce.

The guest drank spirits, and she wine. She cast a glance at his hands and noticed his finger nails were black; which did not please her. She reflected with a touch of anxiety: "I wonder where he has sprung from—hope he will not become too pressing!" But when the glasses had been emptied, the guest called for his bill. One whole minute elapsed ere he drew out his purse. Its contents did not suffice. He searched all his pockets, put together all they yielded, and paid up.

"Nothing left for you—nothing," he remarked, with a smile in Dulce's direction.

"Really?" she murmured in polite wonder. "Our guests are close-fisted."

The stranger searched afresh, found a bluish red piece of paper and tendered it to her.

"My dear Sir," she laughed, "what should I do with a

lottery ticket? I am Luck in person!" Mechanically she put the paper back in her satchel perhaps to avoid throwing it on the floor, but she could not resist an exclamation:

"Fool—oh, what a fool!"

The guest went out and Dulce returned to her stool. "Just look at the like of him—but he must needs frequent a bar!"

Rain watered the panes unceasingly and permeated everything with its deadly melancholy.

For lack of something better to do, Dulce picked up an old newspaper. She had greater respect for things that had happened than things born of fancy, so the heading "Latest News" interested her more than the humourous serial. But true daughter of her time, she also paid attention to the more serious things. So, after devouring accounts of some tragedy of the sea, she would turn to the parliamentary drama.

Nature is in all things. The next day, no newspaper was required to help Dulce kill time. The evening fell quietly and wonderfully over the city, and droves of gallant customers saw to it that the bar was kept noisily lively. At the beginning, Dulce had sat by her employer; later, indeed almost into the morning hours, with a Polish diplomat.

She drank endlessly and absorbed compliments that would have warmed the heart of a future Queen of Poland.

"If these things you say are not flatteries," she remarked, "they give me a right to expect that the cavalier I honour with my favours be not picked up in the gutter."

"What do you mean by that?" enquired heatedly the young Pole.

"Oh, nothing much, my friend—no more than this: do you think you are able to jump over this table—in an orderly fashion, I mean?"

"How is such thing possible, fair one?"

"I wonder at your asking me such a question."

After a while the man set to trying to accomplish the task, and all present had to confess that to a Polish diplomat nothing is impossible.

"I have great hopes," said Dulce, "that after you have settled the Lettgallen question, they will transfer you to

London. There have been diplomats here who could not even jump over the threshold in an orderly fashion."

The whole place burst into drunken laughter. Dulce's supremacy was unchallenged, and she picked out every evening some butt for her sardonic humour. Diplomats were succeeded by men of letters, artists, lawyers and even members of the Academy—beginning with tailors who had attained that dignity and climbing up to Professors. The band played the "Toreador" and challenged all present to combat—if not with bulls, then as a journalist somewhat vulgarly put it, with rams. Which comes to pretty much the same thing.

The café was in its heyday. Dulce had transformed it into a garden in the midst of which grew a tree of knowledge with apples she took care to provide. Like Eve she wandered through the garden, drawing from the tree poisonous draughts to present to melancholy friends. They came and went, these specimens of great Masculinity; she looked upon them for a moment and speedily forgot them. A playful courtesan, who founded cabarets instead of nunneries but reached to an intensity almost like unto a religious cult! Come, enjoy me, forget all that annoys and torments you! I wait upon your comings and goings! Ah—how I wait upon your going! For it is seldom one comes along on whom I feel disposed to shower further favour.

In the days of Lent, when men are intoxicated rather with the opening of the frozen waters and the sight of God's first green leaves than with the prepared alcohol of man, there came quieter days for the "Pink Ass."

Dulce complained: "I intended yesterday going to the seafloor, but the moths have eaten up my summer dress. From this hour I am going to restrict myself to business men and hook myself on to a merchant."

"They're not the right ones," retorted Lipsi, a little brunette with irreproachably waved hair and the feet of Terpsichore. "They usually prefer seeing us undressed!"

"Really? Well, whom would you recommend?"

"The best of all were a Rothschild who does not lift his winnings."

"Speak more plainly," commanded Dulce.

So Tipsi-Lipsi related some newspaper story of a first prize in a lottery which for some unknown reason had been left unclaimed by its winner. For a wonder, Dulce had neither read nor heard the story. She laughed aloud:

"Well, what about it? Perhaps he is dead."

Then it suddenly occurred to her: "How could I have forgotten it? Strange!" Dulce recalled the lottery ticket she had received seven months ago from the stranger guest. She hastily searched her satchel, but found nothing there. "I must find it at all costs—I must satisfy myself of the point!" She thought, and reflected on the possible places at home it might be worth while searching. Thus is it sometimes when one's dress tears or a button falls off from some awkward place and one must somehow find a usually worthless needle.

The next day the rumour spread about the "Pink Ass" that Dulce Vanna had won two hundred thousand.

"Stuff and nonsense!" scoffed the landlord, whom this rumour, if true, would chiefly affect.

"Nonsense is sometimes pretty, even of the stuff variety," retorted Dulce. "Pity the caption is so commonplace: No. 00567."

That was merely the talk of her lips; in reality she was incapable of thought on the matter. This event had hit her with paralysing suddenness, like an unexpected, friendly box on the ears, which some would take as a thousand times manifolded caress and others as a dumfounding blow. Cruel pain and a cruel joy wrestle together till one or the other secures the upper hand or—which is mostly the case—till they both fall exhausted. But in this case there was a very solid residuum, which made the whole affair the more complicated. While her colleagues were wagging their tongues stiff discussing her and her future, Dulce sat as one in a trance, unable to master her excitement. Before her eyes surged the memory of an evening, foggy and cold—but rows of figures danced phantomlike in the mist. . . .

The customers were talking: "Dulce cannot grasp it—that a beggar should have made her rich." The "ladies" countered: "Don't sing out too soon—rich men will soon make her poor again!"

Dulce, who could not settle with herself, heard the talk of the others and it seemed to her they judged aright. "They understand—this is only money, and my money at that. But if any one thinks it is happiness—well, it just isn't."

She gave away part of the money to her friend, a girl dancer who, on going home drunk one night, had slipped and broken her leg. Some more she locked up in a drawer. With the rest she bought dresses and jewelry. And she did all this in a sort of half-awake state; if anyone had asked her why, she would have stamped her foot impatiently and cried out: "Well, why on earth not? What am I to do?" Sometimes she wanted to drown her thoughts in wine; at other moments she wanted to leave the café. But her feet seemed rooted to its floor, and she remained. She thought occasionally that these roots proceeded from the suddenness of it all and that one must wait till evening grew into morning and the unusual lapsed again into the usual. But the more she seemed to regain repose, the acuter grew the vision of that rainy autumn evening long ago.

Her colleagues spoke ever of a lucky chance that had come to her, but she felt there is nothing in this world that is mere chance. What the word is applied to, she thought, works far beyond itself, like the sun—or else stretches out its moist, sticky legs like a spider: "And I know nothing more, I don't know whether in this case it is the sun or the spider." So she spun her fancies and could reach no conclusion.

Mine host of the "Pink Ass," for his part, recovered his smile: "The woman is not thinking of leaving. The fool! She has no idea how to profit by her new situation. If she were just the tiniest bit cute, I should have to shell out heavy."

She really was not thinking of leaving, though her staying on failed to bring with it the pleasure she had formerly felt. She no longer challenged anyone to jump over the table. Somber and indifferent, she was a riddle to everybody. At such a time! Just at such a time!

Her colleagues joked: "Sure you're not in love? Love ought to come with the dot."

"What driveling nonsense!" No, no—there was no man, not one, for that sort of thing. Throughout these days there was but one face she recollected, from out all the mud and glass-clinking of a whole half year: that of the belated guest. That she saw with amazing sharpness.

And this was quite natural.

She saw the shadow of this man spread over the whole elfin, vivid background of the ground. She saw him come in, sit down, search all his pockets in a ridiculous way, pay up his modest bill, give her—good Heavens!—that lottery ticket, and go out in the night again, to carry his invisible burden. Before her eyes she had the vision of his longish, pale face, the deep but hearty eyes, the thin, supple fingers with which he lifted his glass slowly to his lips. True, his nails were a trifle unclean, but surely they have now been cleaned long since. . . . His suit seemed ill chosen for the late autumn, but surely now he has a new one. And he must have risen greatly in the world. That is why one sees him no more.

In these memories there lay something bitter, tormenting. From experience she knew that all memories are light and patchy: blood leaves behind it only the impression of its sinister colour. The past cannot torture, not even in the case of a criminal. The sting of conscience is not driven home by fear of the past, but by the terror of the future.

Yet, Dulce received from this incomplete past a distinct impression of torment. The acuter grew this impression, the more conscious she became that she was possessed of an insane craving to see her stranger once more, to look him up and down, to speak to him, even—a few words.

What few words? God alone knew that. Perhaps of excuse for having dubbed him a fool. That would be little enough!

Dulce closed her eyes and strove hard to forget everything else, to recall only his appearance, to rehearse her first words to him in case of a sudden meeting. Her first words—"Yes, what would I say? What? I would be silly, dazed; I would not know what to say; I would only cry out—no, not that! for Heaven's sake not that!" The words rushed to her lips almost aloud, interrupting this strange

rehearsal. "Is it possible? I experience something akin to gratitude, pity, curiosity. But nothing more—nothing. . . . For, in fine, I do not know him at all. I must say he was so very uninteresting—was he really? And after all it is possible he is no longer in existence. He might have been on any one of these ten ships that have gone to the bottom since then. He might have died in quite a natural way. And—above all else, I would have to cast all this money at his feet. Could I do that? Would I have strength enough left to do that? How could I put out my hand to him thereafter? Imagination, is it?" All this clever meditating achieved little. Someone had penetrated into that tiny laboratory of hers that men call the soul and was working there without her direction. That someone would have been but a poor workman had he not used as his tool that most mysterious and wonderful of all forces: unconscious, unexplainable love.

When, amid her sad sighs, Dulce reached this certainty, she sought no longer to conceal that she was waiting for her stranger.

Her colleagues smiled sympathetically, with an appearance of pity, but at the bottom they were quietly very pleased. They had lost a rival who, though she could excite the guests in her own serious way, would henceforth leave to them the profit of exploiting that excitement. Mine host was the only one who reassumed an anxious face. He had his reasons: a well-known and rich man about town had complained that there sat a few weeks past a veritable Madonna in the bar, but that if it was Mr. Markwardt's (such was the landlord's name) intention to conduct a prayer meeting on his premises, he and his friends would migrate elsewhere.

The landlord did all in his power to avert such a calamity. He had enough experience to know how to choose the means that most surely led to his ends, and on many occasions Dulce really submitted. In these cases her liveliness surpassed all previous experiences; she not only contrived to kindle the eyes of sleepy toppers, but her vitality infected even the curtains on the windows and doors that exhaled the scent of long-spilled wine. "Such an evening is worth

whole week!" thought the barkeeper, who gradually accustomed himself to Dulce's moods. As a business man, he naturally wondered why in the world she stayed on, also why, despite her somberness, she so adorned herself.

All the accustomed toppers still came to the place, but they did not recognise their old Dulce. Nervously she chased the beggars away who, through the negligence of the waiters, sometimes penetrated to the inner door and prayed for *kopecks*.

"There are no *kopecks* here!" she would shout, stamping her feet. "There are only *roubles* here, hundreds and thousands of *roubles*! Away with you!"

Having thus relieved her strained nerves, she would sit down and not rise again the whole evening.

Towards the end of August, when the summer holiday trippers started coming back, likewise the beggars singing in numbers to the music of barrel-organs, barkeepers have much ado. It is quite a false popular impression that relief funds are more burdened these days with beggars than are first-class restaurants. From early morning on, these people try to penetrate into the cafés; they frequently come twice a day. If one concludes in the end that they are just barely supportable, it is because they are the only Gentiles in the city who will bear curses, shouts and blows with equanimity.

The "Pink Ass" derived some benefit from Dulce's active assistance in driving away this pest. She developed a remarkable energy in this pursuit, for she was in such a mood that she would have loved to throw the whole world out of the door.

"Dulce!" someone addressed her one evening, "see, the long-lost knight is there! Look at him!"

She rose lightly, gladly, as she had been wont to do in former days when invited to sit at the table of some wealthy client. A man stood at the outside door and held a torn rouble note in his outstretched hand. What did he want? In tatters, unshaven, he leaned against the portal and made no sign of intending retreat.

"Get out!" shouted Dulce, seizing his hand and pushing him out of the door.

The rouble note fell on the floor.

At that moment she encountered the soft, begging eyes of the hobo and staggered back into the room. The people laughed cruelly. When she opened her eyes again, the door was wide open, but the unshaven man was no longer there. Only the rouble note lay on the floor. Dulce ran out to fetch back the stranger, but there was nothing outside but the clear and cool air of a September night.

On her return even her colleagues applauded, and all present who knew something of the matter, realised that Dulce had just driven her loved one out of the door.

The applause could not intensify her sorrow; she dragged herself into the backroom and collapsed on the sofa.

Had anyone been eavesdropping, he would have heard a despairing, dreamy, choking voice crying repeatedly:

"This is the last straw! Had I only not driven him out with my own hands!"

She became unrecognisable after this; yet she remained in the café till the first rainy night, when she suddenly disappeared without anyone noticing.

The "Pink Ass" carried on for a while, living on its reputation. But to the joy of the police and of all three crosses—the White, the Blue and the Red—it started to die away and soon closed up.

Now a Jew has settled down in part of it, and sells harness and such like to the public at large and morphia to his acquaintances—all "at purchase price."

Nothing definite is known as to Dulce's fate. A former habitué of the "Pink Ass" thinks he saw her once, entirely down at the heels, with a man in similar plight. Someone else maintains a different story: that he had caught a glimpse of her in an elegant carriage. But since both informers had only seen her back, one may give them what credence one wants to. The second tale is perhaps the likelier; but there is possibility that neither the one nor the other is true. It is somewhat difficult to ascertain the facts with certainty, for in our modern times no one can see the dead.

DEATH

By J. AKURATERS

WE sat and listened to the thunder of the big guns. Their deep rumble trembled in the rain-laden night air like a vast complaint, as if somewhere near a giant lay dying and sobbed out his soul in death convulsions.

We sat in a mud hut, in a Russian swamp, a place whence the souls of warriors had taken their last upward flight in thousands. A small stove burned lazily and the moisture of the soil rose through the litter of pine branches. At times this sodden floor would quake under the shock of some great bursting shell; then the silence of the night would drop its pall once more.

Men speak not of death on the battlefield. For there, death is a commonplace thing; it is too ever present to be a topic of conversation. But this was an exceptional case, and we had started discussing death. In our little group, memories were exchanged of moments when death had stared us in the face, and of men who no longer dwelt among the living.

One man smiled ironically as each tale was told: he was a subaltern, who before the war had wandered about Europe as a political exile, full of modern wisdom, a futurist in spirit and in manner. One felt that he was a well of mystery, that in his inmost being he communed with the centuries to come. He had so accustomed himself to war conditions that he would have found it unthinkable to be anywhere else than here. Not that he cared for battle or victory; he had no country to fight for: in this, too, he was a futurist. But he loved strong emotions; the whistle of bullets and the feel of the breath of death.

To him, life in the trenches was the ultra-modern expression of life. The towns where peace still reigned, the people who opened fearful eyes when they were being told of

barrage fire, were, in his opinion, redolent of past, mouldy centuries. Often, when from the enemy's front line, but half a verst away, rifle and trench mortar fire was opened, he would rush out, in order, as he expressed it, to hear around him "the hum of the Divine Bees of Death."

A queer dispensation of fate seemed to protect him always, and, on his return from such expeditions, he would beam as in enjoyment of some rare sensation, and his eyes glittered as in the fever of wine. To him all was the same: life, or death.

So he just listened to our talk and smoked his everlasting cigarettes, and smiled. Then he seemed to fall into deep thought, happiness played brightly about his lips and his face was as if transfigured into one of strange beauty. Suddenly he started speaking:

"Death, gentlemen, is a magnificent sensation, as is all that is given to us, so it be yet strong and young. But one must not belittle it; then it loses its flavour and becomes useless, commonplace, horrible!"

We looked at him in some astonishment. Such philosophy, such an angle, was, if not rare, at least sufficiently odd.

"What do you mean?" enquired a volunteer, who had once been an archeologist. "You say death must be young? How can it be either young or old, since it comes to us but once?"

"Of course it can," replied Svocks, the young futurist officer. "Do you not know that it is possible to belittle death, to wear it down, to reduce it to the banal level of *bourgeoisie*? It is with death as with love; they both draw to an end only with the decay of old age. There is love that accompanies us everywhere, eternally, in its very first, purest form. And there is another love that fades away in our hands and begins to smell bad. What is it that gives all things their savour? The moment, the subtle shades of feeling that we do not allow to escape and evaporate, but bottle up within our inmost selves as in a treasure chamber. What sweet perfume they have when we unlock our chest of memories and find them again! But this one seldom does. The usual course is to prostitute the tenderest sensations and to weep over them; they become

repulsive then, as dead bodies from the bondage of which there is no escaping." He made a contemptuous gesture.

"But death," someone protested, "death surely does not belong to everyday sensations?"

"It is made so," retorted Svock with rising heat. "Death is a fine, aristocratic sensation, but not for the *bourgeois*. How do they die, the *bourgeois* of this old world? They lie abed till death itself grows old waiting for them. And when they die there remains nothing of them behind—no memories, no joys, no freshness—nothing but grey ashes. . . . Do you not believe in immortality? Do you often crave to seize this abstraction, to feel it with your hands, to hear it with your ears, to see it with your eyes? You could see it, if you were able to die taking joy in death. I assure you of this: it seems to me sometimes that only a few of the dead are immortal. Have you never experienced that men become younger, more beautiful, more truly alive after death? I have. And it affords happiness to be with such . . ." He stopped and over his face there spread a soft shadow of pain.

Outside, bullets were sighing as they struck the moist earth.

And for a while he was silent.

"Tell us a tale," asked the archeologist. We knew from experience that Svock's tales always suggested rare thoughts and pleasures.

"Aye, I could tell you tales," Svock started slowly. "You know that palaces and the temples of God that have been destroyed by some catastrophe preserve their beauty for thousands of years in the bosom of the earth. There are men who have a like gift, but one must search memory for them, and then they take life again and become radiant with light . . ."

On his face, as he spoke, there lay the reflection of a wondrous happiness. He proceeded:

"I was a Terrorist in those days . . . ten years or more ago. I lived among Terrorists, for in the old-fashioned world of that time it seemed to me that only among these joyous men was it possible to breathe aright. Gentlemen—I need not remind you—you all know the cemetery-like

peace of Russia under the Tzars, and the conditions that reigned in that realm of peace. We will not speak of that. But in that world there also lived men of spiritual strength and beauty—such beauty that even death could not dim it, but rather gave it a further perfection. Among us were only such as had come to see that in that vast empire there were only two outlets for those who felt a craving for a fuller life: either end it all with a bullet, or become a Terrorist. And all of us had elected the latter alternative, for through it the former, too, could be reached. These were splendid men, full of the joy of life, refined, aristocrats of the mind, and, what is particularly worth noting, favoured by nature with great gifts for science or for art.

Living in a community with them I had occasion to see what death really is. I never saw them dying—that is only witnessed by the executioners in some dark corner o' nights—but the moment of their supreme leave-taking was also the moment of supreme sensation and foretaste of death. It is since those days that I know how beautiful a thing death can be . . .”

He closed his eyes and an almost imperceptible happy smile rested on his lips. It was as if he had seen some loved apparition within himself and were holding converse with it.

“It was a woman. . . . She suffered death at the executioners’ hands, somewhere on a bleak coast, at the place appointed for executions, alone, friendless. Yet if I try to persuade myself that she is dead, I cannot succeed.

We lived in a quiet seaside resort on the Finnish coast, not far from Petrograd. From our villa one could see the cold grey sea bathed in the rays of the autumn sun. The house was surrounded by a wooded park where, on a fine day, the last birch leaves gave a touch of yellow light. Over it all reigned an extraordinary quietness, for the summer holiday makers had gone back to their city homes and the only people who walked in the deserted streets were the house proprietors and such as we ourselves.

One fine day she arrived there from the capital, for she too had reached the conclusion common to us all. And there was no looking back. We knew that well enough and

took her in with pleasure to live with us as a citizen of our little world.

She was of average build, tender and supple, with rounded breasts and an open face on which a smile ever played, and a frank, cordial expression. Her eyes, in their nervous liveliness, were her finest feature. She was just twenty. Her black, unusually abundant and silky hair called for much time and care, and seemed to overweight the light, graceful head.

How we all loved her, we few who lived in the house! Not, as you may believe, that her gracious womanliness held us enthralled. No, it was her mind—so eager for freedom, so full of the days to come, and of the milk of human kindness—that had us under a spell. When she spoke of her mission, there was something religious in her exaltation, something holy, full of humanity and tender open-heartedness; and her womanly beauty but invested her with a special glamour.

She was of the nobility, but cared not to speak of that. She was a singer and had come straight to us on leaving the Conservatoire. Nowadays, when I recall her singing, during which her whole body thrilled lightly, it seems to me as if before it the world's finest singing must pale. I know this: had she not died, there is no one in Europe could have come up to her. I only once heard her voice free, full and untrammelled—and that was her farewell. . . .

No need, gentlemen, to burden you with details. You can have but little understanding for that world of ours: to you it is a *milieu* either of criminals or of mad dreamers. Yet after it, how tasteless and repulsive is the everyday world, the world of 'peace'. . . ! But that too, you will not understand, and that is good. For the beautiful and the sublime are not for the many.

The day had come when she was to fulfil her obligation to the Terrorist cause. The state of mind among us was one of rare spiritual elevation, and yet not untinged with sadness. The circumstances were such that there was no escape possible for her whether she were to succeed or to fail.

She had returned from Petrograd the day before, whither

she had gone to get news. She laughed brightly, breathed freely and talked much. She had bought a whole heap of roses, dark red, sweet-smelling roses. She had her arms full of them and looked up at us from between their petals as she said: 'I have brought you roses!'

It seemed to us as if the scented greeting of the roses mingled with hers. She filled all the vases in the place with the roses, singing softly all the while, and poured cool water over flowers and leaves.

We photographed her thus, so as to have a souvenir of her. But that was quite superfluous. I have long since lost her photograph, but She—whose name I will not tell even you—lives for me as beautiful, as truly alive, as ever.

The evening came. We wandered up and down the seafront and talked, the kind of talk men indulge in in great, fateful hours. Eternity was embraced in these half-spoken words. . . . Then it was I came to realise that there is in the universe but one thing that is everlasting: Beauty, whether of the flesh or the spirit. We returned to the villa, wrapped in that sad, quiet twilight of the North of a late autumn evening. In the yard, some young, long-haired dogs were playing about near the kennel. She lifted up one of them and pressed it to her breast. It twisted itself into her long, shining, black hair, and she laughed merrily, with the clear, joyous note of a brook that leaps over the boulders in the sunshine. Warm, happy life pulsed in her breast. None of us thought of her approaching death. She least of all.

Then we had tea and talked long, brilliantly, about art, life and love. The lamp burned steadily and under the warmth of the room the roses diffused their scent. Somehow, without intention, our talk had drifted on to the question of life and death. Her words still ring clear in my ears:

'It matters nothing at all whether we live twenty or a hundred years. It is not the number of years but the degree of intensity of their living that exhausts our capacity for life. One may experience in one moment what another may take fifty years to live through. He to whom the gods give the privilege to crowd in an instant the sweetness

of life, requires but few years to reach his fullest development. I do not think there can be in store for us a finer time than this. That is why it matters nothing one way or the other . . .'

Her face shone with spiritual light and it seemed to me as if we now saw nothing but the beauty of her spirit, that was so much finer than the beauty of her flesh.

Then—it was midnight, and the appointed time for separation had come—she sang. I know I will nevermore hear singing like unto it. She stood up among us and sang the 'Marseillaise.' Her beautiful, supple young body throbbed as a new bell; her fresh voice rang out with such force and splendour that it seemed as if the very walls of the place were joining in the singing. Then I understood that artistic beauty can inspire the finest exaltation, one that is God given and is far sweeter and finer than that dispensed by the cups of Dionysius.

Then came the most poignant moment. There was sudden silence in the room. She kissed us all in turn, brightly and affectionately; in that kiss there lay something of earthly love and something of eternal memory.

We accompanied her through the darkness to the station. I remember only the whine of the key in the lock as I, last to come in, shut the door. . . . She was gone.

The authorities in the Empire of Slavery worked with merciless determination. Two days later, in the grey of an autumn morning, as we were drinking a cup of tea, we received the news of her death together with some details of the course of events.

And, believe me, gentlemen—not one of us could imagine that she was dead. We only felt she had gone on a journey. Her voice still rang in the room; we heard the swish of her stylish clothes, the tread of her feet. I almost fancied she sat with us at table and said: 'Don't believe it, dear friends, it was all a joke!'

There stood the roses she had brought, and exhaled their light, sweet scent in the room. We could see her fingers busily arranging them. We felt her presence everywhere. The sound of her singing and the perfume of her young body filled the house.

Such were our days just after her death. When we spoke of her it gave us pleasure, no pain. To this day, the thought of her brings me nothing but happiness and a sense of the joy of living—no mould and dust and ashes, but light and love and adoration.

Only the first fearful moment must be overcome and all the rest follows of itself.

You see, gentlemen, that is the tale of a young, a beautiful, a lovable death. The *bourgeois* death—mere husk—the Devil himself would not take a hand in it!"

Svocks stopped speaking. In the look he gave us a smile of contempt lay half concealed.

Outside shrapnel fire was opening on our positions. Svocks rose and went out.

Perhaps he had gone to flirt with death, while it was "young and beautiful," to hear its whistling and roaring. Perhaps these sounds inspired in him dreams of some strange life, unintelligible to us. . . .

The volunteer archeologist remarked: "Funny people there are in this world!"

But no one answered him.

UNCLE FERDINAND

By KRISTIAN ELSTER

KNUT heard shuffling footsteps over in the corner and the sound of coal being poured into the stove. Morning had come. And now he had to get up. As he slept in the dining room, he had strict orders to get up as soon as Brita had lighted the fire. A sort of glow flickered over the floor—Brita had probably left the door of the stove open. If he could only stay in bed until the room got warm! He stuck his head out of the bedcovers and saw a frosty window pane and darkness outside. Downstairs a child was crying. Oh, Lord, if he only didn't have to get up!

Through the crack in the door he saw that the light was burning in his parents' room. So they were already up. He heard his mother's low dissatisfied whine and his father's plaintive explanatory replies. Knut lay in bed listening to his father's voice, it seemed so pathetic, cold and whimpering. At last he caught the words: "You haven't seen my suspenders, have you? Where in the world are my suspenders?"

Brita had finished poking the fire, and casting a sleepy glance over at Knut, she grumbled: "It's about time you were getting up." She stared for a moment at the frozen panes and went out.

Knut dressed over by the stove where there was a little warmth. Could anything be more rotten than to have to go to school so early? And the worst of it was that one's own father was a teacher.

His mother came in in a petticoat and a pink flannel dressing sack, with her hair gathered at the top of her head in an untidy knot. She closed the door of the stove and didn't even say good morning, but just stared at the frost-covered windows.

"The thermometer is fourteen below zero," said Knut in a low voice.

"And think how coal is going up!" wailed the mother.

"Tell the little ones they can dress in here if they want to." The father came in too, a tall, ungainly, thin sort of man, with a large head of black hair streaked with grey and bluish, rather frightened baby eyes. He held the palms of his hands up against the stove.

"The thermometer is fourteen below," said Knut.

"And think of the price of coal!" the mother said again, as she put Knut's bedclothes away in the divan. "And Christmas not here yet!"

The two smaller children, Jens and little Mette, came in with their arms full of clothes. "Gee, it's cold," the boy shivered, standing on one leg.

"Get over by the stove and hurry up and dress," the mother said sharply. Brita came to set the breakfast table. "But the room hasn't been aired," remonstrated the mother, "we'll have to open the parlour door." She opened the door to the next room and the air came in like a cold breath. They heard her trying to open the window in there. "No, I can't make it," she sighed despondently.

The father and Knut sat down at table. Teacher Nilsen put his watch on the table before his plate. "Fourteen degrees, and Christmas not yet here," he mumbled. "But I've got to hurry," he said, as the whistle blew at a neighbouring factory.

"Although we used to go to school even earlier," he said with one of those associations of ideas which no one could follow, "it seems to me it wasn't so dark and cold, in my youth. And Ferdinand, he was such an early bird, he'd whistle, he'd always whistle, when he dressed."

"Uncle Man coming back with Christmas present for me," cried little Mette, over by the stove.

"I shouldn't be surprised, I shouldn't be surprised." The father shrugged his shoulders so that his tie went way up under his chin. "He used to give the funniest presents, he did. He was a queer one, Ferdinand. I'm sure he's made a lot of money, over there, in the West."

"Why in the world start the morning by talking of Ferdinand," the mother said petulantly. "You don't know anything about him. You don't even know if he's alive—you've said so yourself."

Teacher Nilsen looked up rather peevishly: "You don't know what you're talking about. As if I didn't know anything about Ferdinand! You say that because you never met him. Ferdinand—he was wonderful. Of course he's alive. If anyone's alive it's Ferdinand. I'll even go so far as to say that there's no reason why he shouldn't come here one day, and say: 'I'm rich, I'm awfully rich—let's share—take half. When we were boys we always shared and you helped me with my lessons—I was always poor in English composition—and now it's my turn, take half of what I have.'"

He stared at the frozen panes.

Knut burst out, "And what would you do, Father?"

"What would I do?" Teacher Nilsen chewed thoughtfully on a large piece of bread. Great God! Such possibilities as the words conjured up before his imagination! It made his mind whirl. He nodded his head with determination. "I'd give up my job as teacher and finish my book on English philology—that is, if he had enough money," he added prudently.

His wife went about muttering and complaining. She had heard about this brother-in-law for so many years and all she really knew about him was that he had been a lazy good-for-nothing at school and then gone off to sea. "If you, who stayed on land, haven't amounted to anything, it isn't probable that he amounted to anything on sea; and if he didn't drown in the waves he was probably hanged on shore," she said.

The more she scolded the more Teacher Nilsen seemed to shrivel up. He kept staring at the windows. The room wasn't warm yet and the darkness outside did not seem to fade. And little Mette couldn't get her stockings on, and cried because no one would help her.

But when his wife had stopped scolding, Teacher Nilsen shot his long body straight up, just as a snail comes out of its shell when one stops poking it, and his eyes winked and his mouth murmured softly and stubbornly, "Maybe. Maybe. It's true Ferdinand was a blockhead at school. But he was too big for school. Conditions were too narrow for him, here. He couldn't stand the cold, the dark.

He belonged where flowers bloom twice a year, where tropical fruits grow and where the palm leaves wave . . .”

“Palms,” said little Jens; “they’ve a palm in the parlour downstairs.”

“Don’t talk to me about palms—in pots,” the father waved disparagingly with his hand. “I mean growing palm trees, where Ferdinand is. I seem to see him,” he said in a moved voice, “wandering around on his estates—on his hacienda,”—he sort of sang as he spoke the foreign word—“miles and miles of fruit-gardens, thousands of heads of cattle, sheep, wheat fields, banana plants—he has to ride on horseback from early dawn till late at night to cross his property. Because,” and he turned to his wife, “I know they’ve estates like that over there—I’ve read about them.”

“Has he any horses?” asked Jens.

“Horses? Horses?” the father smiled. “He doesn’t even know how many he has.” And, turning to his wife again, “Because Ferdinand is like that. He never counts. He doesn’t keep track of things like that. He only deals in large quantities. We’ve got to hurry, Knut—it’s late.”

But still he remained sitting a moment with his hands folded on the table and staring into the darkness outside. He couldn’t get over Ferdinand, and he hated teaching, and the school.

“I’m going, Father,” said Knut, with his coat on.

The air was raw outside, the cold pricked like little needles of ice. From the shop windows there came a pale light through the frost-covered windows and the snow creaked underfoot. Over the fjord the heaven seemed black.

Knut walked two or three steps behind his father. It’s an awful nuisance to come to school with a teacher! And his father couldn’t keep any discipline at all, in the lower grades. But Knut had to come up alongside him, just the same, to ask, “Do you really think Uncle Ferdinand rides on his own horse, every day?”

“Of course. He has lots of them.”

“Why doesn’t he ever write, do you think, Father?”

Teacher Nilsen froze up. “Who knows. Perhaps the

letters went astray. And besides, out there—in the great world—where there's sun and summer all the year round, one is apt to forget. I mean, one doesn't think of writing. But Ferdinand won't forget us. Never. Come, let's hurry."

II

At home, Jens and Mette sat playing that Uncle Ferdinand had come home. Mette was supposed to be the mother, who was home alone, and Jens was Uncle Ferdinand. "How do you do?" Uncle Ferdinand said. "Here are a few Christmas presents for all of you."

"You've brought something for us? Let us see."

"Here's a lion, a tiger and a palm," said Uncle Ferdinand.

"Put them out in the kitchen," said Mette, imitating her mother's peevish voice.

The mother went about annoyed. Always that Uncle Ferdinand! A real calamity. His name was on everybody's lips, all the time in the house—in jest and play, and as a sort of panacea for all evils—for a toothache, for a stomach ache, when there was no money. It was a real curse.

"Why don't you play something else!" she cried. But a moment later they were playing Uncle Ferdinand again.

"I've some English commoners for Father."

"Put them in the kitchen," said Mette. "Jens, what's an English commoner?"

"I don't know," said Jens.

"Brita has gone to get the milk, and I've got to go out to get some dinner," said the mother, "so you'll be alone. Jens, take care of Mette. And if the doorbell rings, open and say I'll be right back."

The children kept on playing. Jens sat in the rocking chair and pretended he was Uncle Ferdinand riding over his fields. They put a plant on the floor—it was a palm tree. And Mette was sitting in a forest of palm trees. "And then Uncle Man comes and he says, he says, 'Here's ten cents,' he says, 'now you go and buy everything you want.'"

The bell rang. Jens opened the front door just enough to

peek out. Mette pulled her brother's sleeve, and called out, "Mother isn't home but she'll be right back."

"And isn't your father home either?" said the man outside.

"Father's gone to school, and Knut, too, but you can come in, if you'll be good, and wait till mother comes back."

The man walked in slowly. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man, but frightfully emaciated. His beardless face with the blue-white eyes, was dark, and he had large, tanned hands. He wore a cap which he hung on the rack in the hall; he had a tightly buttoned coat and a muffler around his neck.

They went into the dining room. Mette went up to him and started staring at him. Then she pointed to the plant and said, "There's Uncle Man's palm."

Jens laughed. "She means Uncle Ferdinand. She don't know how to speak straight yet."

The stranger grew sort of rigid, and blinked his eyes as the father often did. "Uncle Ferdinand's palm, you said?"

"Yes, and that's his horse," said Jens, pointing to the rocking chair. "He's got so much land he has to ride to get across it."

"Is that so? And who told you?"

"Father."

"And Christmas, Uncle Man coming with present for me."

"And Father'll get as much money as he wants."

"And I'll get ten cents to go and buy what I want," said Mette.

The stranger had sat down and he looked at the children and then around the room. Jens' trousers were patched. The chairs were cheap. There was the old divan-bed with the corner of a sheet showing. And the same old dining-room table.

Jens went up to him and looked the stranger straight in the eyes.

"Are *you* Uncle Ferdinand?"

A shock ran through the dark face and the eyes blinked helplessly. Then came an almost inaudible voice, "Yes . . . I'm Uncle Ferdinand."

III

When Mrs. Nilsen came home she found a strange man sitting in the rocking chair with both children on his knee. "Here's Uncle Ferdinand," Jens called out.

Mrs. Nilsen stared at him. The man put the children down and rose. "Yes, it's true," he said.

"And Uncle Ferdinand has an awful lot of horses and a terrible lot of cows, and it's just like Father said."

Fru Nilsen went over to the table and put her parcels down. She felt her knees growing weak and it seemed to her that she was smiling a silly smile. "Is it really true?" was all she could say.

"Well, one always has a little something," Uncle Ferdinand answered with an evasive look.

Fru Nilsen had to sit down.

"To think that you've come back! Why, I'm so surprised—I even forget to bid you welcome! Great heavens—what will Anders say! And I who thought——" she broke off immediately. "But let me give you a cup of coffee, first of all."

"Thanks, thank you, very much," Uncle Ferdinand murmured. "It's gotten awfully cold here, these last years."

Fru Nilsen opened the stove door. "We stay in the dining room most of the time. You see, it's too expensive to keep a fire going in the parlour."

"And isn't it cold where you are?" Jens asked.

"No, it isn't cold there," Uncle Ferdinand answered almost harshly. "Often it's too warm. How is Anders?"

"Pretty well. But you'll see a change in him." Fru Nilsen couldn't help glancing sidewise at her brother-in-law. Was that the way a person looked when he came back as a rich man?

"You know a private school teacher has a pretty hard life."

"Father teaches at the school where Knut goes," said Jens.

"Yes, he's a teacher—only a teacher," said Fru Nilsen, "and you know what that means. You see how we live. And now we'll have to let the parlour, I'm afraid. At the

end of the month we haven't a cent and owe butcher and baker—everybody."

Uncle Ferdinand sat and gazed at his folded hands. He murmured in a low, soft voice, "Anders was always so clever. He always helped me with my lessons. He wanted to take up science, at that time. Did he give up the idea?"

Fru Nilsen sniffed scornfully. "Pooh! Science! Do you think he could afford to take up science? He has to give private lessons all afternoon. It isn't as with someone who is out in the great world—well, *you* know something about *that*!"

"Very true, very true." Uncle Ferdinand still sat with lowered eyes. "But somehow I imagined that Anders . . ."

"So did I," Mrs. Nilsen sighed. She had taken her hat and coat off by this time. "I, too, thought everything would be different. You know," she spoke quickly, "he's the best and kindest man in the world. But he hasn't any push, and he feels it, too, and that's why he has always admired all you've done. He's always talking about you. And it's very strange, because he never had a sign of life or a word from you. Yet he's always felt how things were going with you. Well, you see how he has spoken to the children about you—it is strange, isn't it? Anders is such a fine man, he has such delicacy of feeling, and his heart has always been with you, his brother. He's followed you from day to day, and everything that happened to you, thousands of miles away, he has felt and seen in his mind's eye. But it is strange, isn't it?"

Uncle Ferdinand seemed still more bowed. He gazed into his hands—deep furrows in the heavy, black hands. "Yes—it is strange," and he suddenly looked up with a shy, dark glance. "I always thought Anders would amount to something—he got the schooling. But apparently the schooling didn't help him any. Sister-in-law," he continued slowly and with much difficulty, "on the boat I met a man who wanted to go home—he had worked hard, but he never had any luck. And now he wants to go back to land, he wants to try to get a job and to meet some decent people—for he comes of a good family—and all he has managed to scrape up is two thousand kroner—that's all he has to fall

back on. To tell the truth I hoped Anders could help him—I imagined Anders had made his mark and was a celebrated scientist or a great professor—in my thoughts I've always called him professor—and I hoped that Anders could . . . but I suppose he can't help this man?" He looked anxiously and dubiously at his sister-in-law.

Fru Nilsen laughed a shrill, short laugh. "Why, Anders can't even help himself. I have to make money on the side by taking in sewing. He's certainly the right person to ask! Oh, it's not the same as with you, brother-in-law," she added with an expectant tremble in her voice.

"Anders has told a great many things about me, I see," said Uncle Ferdinand and looked pensively at the children.

Fru Nilsen studied her brother-in-law's thin, brown face, and large hands—and then she said, almost inaudibly, "And they aren't true, perhaps?"

Uncle Ferdinand did not take his eyes away from the children and he met their great, admiring and expectant eyes. They gazed at him as on a living fairy tale. Then he gave a short laugh. "Perhaps they're true. Such strange things happen out there, in the great world. But you never know how it's going to end. Rich one day and poor the next . . . well, it doesn't go quite as quickly as all that," he added reassuringly. "When will Anders be home?"

"He usually gets back at about half-past two," said Fru Nilsen, pouring out the coffee.

"Will you give me a present for Christmas?" asked little Mette.

"Indeed I will," said Uncle Ferdinand, and bent down and caught her up and placed her on his knee again.

"Tell us some more about how things are, where you come from," said Jens, hanging over him.

Uncle Ferdinand swung little Mette on his knees. He half closed his eyes and smiled a strange smile. "Anders is probably just like he used to be," he said, glancing at his sister-in-law. "He never could see things as they really are. Nor I, for that matter. He used to make up the greatest and most wonderful adventures—fairy tales. And I went off. And I'd quite forgotten, by this time, how dark it is, here, at home. Well, I'll tell you all about it. There's a

river so wide that you can't see from one shore to another and huge steamships go up and down on it. And on each side are great forests, and in the forests there are monkeys, and parrots and all sorts of little birds with wings of silver and gold . . ."

"And you own these forests?"

"Of course! And there are wide prairies, you ride across them for days and meet thousands of cattle and again thousands and the next day more thousands . . ."

"And they are all yours?"

"Of course! And there are gardens full of all that's good. Oranges and bananas, forests of bananas, fields of pineapples and apple orchards are big as the whole city, here . . ."

"And you have such gardens?"

"Of course!"

"Have you come back to stay, brother-in-law?" asked Fru Nilsen.

"For good? No." Uncle Ferdinand put Mette down. "I don't think I'll ever do that. I've too much to take care of, over there. And it's too dark and cold for me, here." He looked at the clock. "I'll be going, sister-in-law, but I'll be right back. I've a few little things to attend to. I'll be back by the time Anders comes home. But in the meantime," he turned his back to his sister-in-law and took something out of an inside pocket, "will you take this and keep it—it's for the children, for Christmas, you understand—nothing to talk about."

He lifted little Mette high up in the air. "Give Uncle Ferdinand a good squeeze." She put her arms around his neck.

"Just like that," he whispered hoarsely. "Two little arms . . . it's such a long, long time ago . . ."

And then Uncle Ferdinand went out.

IV

It was half-past two. They all rushed to the door when they heard the father and Knut come up the stairs. "Uncle Ferdinand has come," they all shouted, and Fru Nilsen

added, "And do you know, it's all true! He'll be back any minute now."

Teacher Nilsen stopped quite still and stared out blankly. "Ferdinand—back? . . . He's not dead, then? Think of it!"

"Dead?" retorted Fru Nilsen contemptuously, "why I always knew he was alive."

They all talked at once. Jens and Mette to Knut, Fru Nilsen to her husband. Teacher Nilsen trembled with excitement—he could scarcely get his coat off.

"He certainly has made his mark," she said, while forests and cattle and gardens and fields whirled around them.

"It's unbelievable," said Teacher Nilsen.

"But it's true, just the same," she said. "He'll be back in a moment."

She began to set the table. She had put on her best blouse, the one of pale blue batiste which she only wore at parties, and she hummed as she moved about. Brita had been sent out for some extra good chopped meat, for meat cakes. Teacher Nilsen paced up and down the floor, nervously.

"Just imagine if . . ."

"What?"

"Nothing. I was only thinking about my English philology."

Mrs. Nilsen laughed contemptuously. "He asked if you weren't professor!"

"Always the same Ferdinand! But why shouldn't I become professor?"

"Yes, why not?"

"See if I don't." Teacher Nilsen snapped his fingers. "But why isn't he here?"

They looked at the clock, surprised. It was almost four.

Mrs. Nilsen caught her breath. "Look," she said, "he gave me an envelope—for the children, for Christmas."

Teacher Nilsen peeped inside. "Two thousand kroner!" he gasped. "Two thousand! Ferdinand certainly is . . ."

"Yes, the man who sets out in the world . . ." she said, caught herself, and blushed.

But the hours passed and there was no sign of Uncle

Ferdinand. Every time they heard footsteps in the hall they all rushed to the door. But there was no sign of him. At last they sat down for dinner. "We'll keep the meat cakes for supper," said Mrs. Nilsen, a bit hesitatingly, "he will surely be back by that time." And they ate some soup that had been warmed over, and some cold fishcakes. They didn't talk while they ate. It grew colder and darkness hung outside the windows impenetrably thick.

Toward evening a messenger came with a letter, written in a large, shaking handwriting, in pencil, on half a sheet of paper.

"I found a telegram which obliges me to take the first boat for the Baltic. I have to go there to see about some property in Russia. I'll probably drop in on the way back. Ferdinand."

Teacher Nilsen read the message twice. "Imagine, he has property in Russia, too. Ferdinand certainly is . . ." he said weakly.

Mrs. Nilsen did not answer. She went out in the kitchen. And while she put the meat cakes in a jar to keep them, till Christmas—they'd surely keep in this cold weather—she mumbled over and over again, "He'll never come back." She went in to take off her nice blouse. She heard her husband talking in the dining room speculating as to what sort of property Uncle Ferdinand had in Russia. . . .

At daybreak a tramp steamer sailed down the Christiania fjord. It was passing through the islands when a stoker stuck his head out of the engine room and gazed out, darkly.

Black sea. White frozen fields. Grey sky.

"Cold and biting and dark," said Uncle Ferdinand, and disappeared in the engine room again.

THE FORGOTTEN GHOST

By KORNEL MAKUSZYNSKI

M. VALENTINE ZIEBA bore the name of a bird, but had not the looks of one; at any rate not of a small bird; he may have looked like a marabou, but then a marabou is not a real bird. Like it, M. Zieba was thin, bald, and absent-minded.

What he was in the habit of thinking about, no man knew. How could anyone guess what was going on in that curious bird's head, so remarkably bald, belonging to the great Zieba?

Notwithstanding his early almost complete absence of hair, he always put a little pomade on his head, a process to which he attached very great importance.

Apart from this, M. Zieba was in every way a very sympathetic and very polite person.

Like a kangaroo, he used to jump from one place to another in a way vastly shocking to his better half. Occasionally he would even try to stand on his head. But whatever his wife might think it her duty to say to him, he always found her charming, beautiful and a credit to her sex.

She was a fat woman and had an odd trick of sticking her finger in her voluminous chest till it was completely buried in the folds of flesh. She was not easy tempered, and when she got going the very pots and pans in the kitchen trembled. Likewise the sparrows in the yard and the policeman on the road. It was rumored that a few passers-by had died of the resultant shock.

This redoubtable person had a daughter, Helusia Ziebanka, whose lily-white complexion was much admired. She was always so elegantly dressed and looked so smart that Zieba sometimes thought she would look much better on his arm than his actual wife.

In M. Zieba's head an idea germinated: it was not an original idea, at least, many people have had it before

M. Zieba. It was simply this: to acquire wealth. It was for Helusia's sake.

Not that he actually wanted to get rid of his wife by illegal means; he was a gentle, decent man and he did not relish the prospect of appearing in the dock of a criminal court, nor of being forsaken by his friends.

The first step was obviously to acquire a small fortune. He felt that would help him a lot in his courtship. So his ingenious brain began to cast about for ways of getting rich. At last a plan occurred to him: he would be a ghost.

That would bring in enough money to secure a divorce and enable him to attain the desired end.

He started haunting spiritualistic seances and endeavoured to learn all he could from watching performers on the stage. At night he would make such a noise in his room that his wife first of all ran to tell all the neighbours and then turned on him, shouting angrily: "Only an idiot like you would carry on like that! Thumping the floor all night long so that no one in the house can sleep a wink! If you go on like that I believe I will have a nervous attack and Helusia, poor child, will go into convulsions."

But Helusia, poor child, was immensely interested in the proceedings, far too much so to worry about convulsions or anything of the kind.

M. Zieba only had to fix his eyes for a few minutes on the ceiling for him to conjure up all sorts of spirits, known and unknown. But Helusia had an aggravating habit of talking during the seances which prevented full success. Also, she bruited them abroad to her friends so that one Friday a perfect deputation, consisting of two actors, one medical man and a well-known writer, came to witness a seance at M. Zieba's house. He began to be known by the flattering designation of "The Devil's Brother."

This seance was a great success. One of the ghosts managed to break a small bottle and another lodged for some time in the gynæcologist's beard, only leaving that refuge to pat M. Zieba's bald head in benevolent fashion. Another spirit positively refused to perform till the piano had been played.

M. Zieba rose and asked in a deep, solemn voice:

"Ghost . . . are you there? Spirit! Who are you?"

Some far-away voice returned an answer:

"I am the spirit of Alexander the Great."

"Kindly inform us whether you are a good or a bad spirit."

"Bad—decidedly bad."

"Tell us why you are bad."

"That's none of your business!"

"Perhaps you are not a Christian ghost."

"I am not. I died in India."

Here M. Zieba interjected a remark to his audience:
"Isn't he wonderful?"

The ghost proceeded:

"I am Satan's spirit."

A tremor ran through the spectators: "Oh . . . oh . . .
Satan's spirit ! ! !"

Just then they actually saw Satan's hoofs. No doubt
was now possible.

"Poor Alexander the Great!" said some one. "Whoever
would have thought he would become so utterly bad!"

M. Zieba himself was astonished.

II

M. Zieba sat alone in his room the next day, still wondering at the events of the night before, which had surprised him beyond measure. He lit a cigar and watched the blue smoke drift out of the room. He felt a mixture of interest and fear. . . .

Suddenly, in the blue smoke, he espied a ghost. He behaved as any decent man would under such circumstances: he turned as white as a sheet and muttered: "My Lord!" The three hairs left to him stood on end.

"Who are you?" he timidly enquired, moving away from the ghost.

In a bolder tone he repeated: "Who are you?"

Large beads of perspiration were trickling down his brow and he felt generally uneasy. He also felt his face must look ghastly in the lamplight.

"I am Alexander the Great," answered the ghost.

"Dear me!" thought M. Zieba. "Playing with spirits is

a dangerous game!" He suddenly realised he was afraid, and that was an awful sensation. But he made an effort to pull himself together and said to himself, "Don't be an ass! Mr. Alexander the Great can't harm you. Besides, he was a famous, influential man. He may be of use to you. Look straight at him. God is with you!"

Presently the spirit began to assume a more definite form: he could see its nose, its eyes and its mouth. This gave him confidence and he started bravely:

"Spirit! Are you truly the spirit you say you are?"

"Yes."

"In the name of the Father and the Son and the . . ."

"Holy Ghost," the spirit obligingly completed.

M. Zieba took a deep breath. This must be a good spirit. Nevertheless he determined to cross-examine a little:

"If you really are the spirit of a heathen king, how is it you can recite our Christian prayers?"

"Who told you I was a heathen?"

"You yourself. You said you were Alexander the Great."

The ghost's lips parted in a smile.

"Oh, Alexander the Great. . . . Yes, so I did, come to think of it. But I am not he, M. Zieba."

"Merciful heavens!" thought Zieba, "he knows my name!"

"How do you know my name?" he asked the ghost.

"From the plate on your door. But what are you trembling for? If you will disturb me during your seances, you will have to put up with the consequences."

"Consequences . . ." muttered he.

"Oh, nothing terrible. Just wait and see!" said the ghost.

"B-but what have I done?"

"You woke me up, so you just have to send me to sleep again."

"Can't you do that yourself?"

"No. You must conjure me up once more."

"Oh, bother!" said M. Zieba.

"Bother? Don't you laugh at me, M. Zieba! Ah, well, I'll let you off this time. Good-bye!"

"Thank you kindly!" said M. Zieba and collapsed in his armchair.

But the spirit still stalked about the room, from the arm-chair to the table. M. Zieba could not see him very distinctly now, but he felt his presence all around him.

"I cannot close my eyes!" remarked M. Zieba.

"I cannot sleep anywhere," retorted the ghost sympathetically.

M. Zieba's fears were evaporating. This seemed a decent sort of ghost once you got used to him. He felt he even liked him. The adventure was beginning to be almost amusing. He enquired:

"So you are not the spirit of Alexander the Great, Sir?"

The ghost uttered a cry like an owl.

"What does that mean?" asked M. Zieba with interest.

"Nothing. I was only wondering how you dare talk like that."

"Sorry, I didn't mean anything by it."

"A bad habit—you had better break it off."

"But do tell me what you mean."

"You want to know who I was when I died long ago? Three years ago it was. I have nothing to do with Alexander the Great."

"How is that?"

"You might light that cigar again and send the smoke my way," remarked the ghost irrelevantly. "I like it."

M. Zieba obligingly relit his cigar and blew a mouthful of smoke in the direction of the voice.

"That better?" he enquired.

"Thank you. . . . There are three kinds of people in the world."

"And what about over there?"

"Over where?"

"I mean after this earthly life."

"Oh, it's simply awful there."

"You don't say so?"

"Well, I ought to know, since I have just come from there and you have not."

M. Zieba asked politely, "When am I to die?"

"Not the foggiest idea."

M. Zieba was disappointed and he showed it. "So you don't even know that?"

"How should I? People may have gravel or arteriosclerosis, but we have no time to take such a minute interest in ordinary mortals."

"But tell me . . . is it really and truly so awful over there?"

"Not really. But it's so sad and monotonous. Of course we ghosts do not care in a seance to speak of the other life. It might be bad for us. To come back to earth is such a treat for us poor ghosts that we prefer to forget about the existence we normally lead."

"But you will not mind telling *me*?"

"Please send over another whiff of cigar smoke. I like that. It's a long time since I had such a treat . . . lying on a sofa and smoking a good cigar. Those are really good cigars you keep. On this earth I never could afford them."

"How was that?"

"Well, you see, I was a university professor."

M. Zieba hung his head in confusion at having suspected a university professor of being able to afford good cigars.

"I wonder," remarked the ghost, "at your not being afraid of me."

"Oh, but I was very much afraid."

"That's gone now, is it? All the better. Only stupid people fear us spirits, for we can do them no harm."

"Can you not do any harm?"

"Well, I can make a noise, break an electric light bulb and rummage the furniture about. That's about all."

"And the others?"

"It all depends. I know a spirit who was an editor in earthly life and was greatly bothered by his creditors. So he became furiously hysterical. Now he spends his time breaking window panes, shutting off the lights, shouting in an uncanny voice, tripping people up and throwing them under motor cars. Quite a dangerous fellow. But I have no wish to have such adventures."

"I am sorry for you."

"That will be accounted unto you for righteousness. You are a good man, Zieba. I wonder if I might ask you a favour?"

"Fire away."

"The cigar is about out now. . . . Is that brandy on the mantelpiece?"

"It is."

"Might I ask you to pour out a few drops into a glass and place it on the table next to me?"

"With pleasure. But . . . may I ask what you intend doing with that brandy?"

"What I usually do in such cases. Not being able to drink it, I just smell it."

M. Zieba half-filled a tumbler and placed it on the table. He could hear the spirit snuffing and breathing heartily.

"Excellent brandy, that."

"Do please finish the bottle," said M. Zieba ironically.

"Now don't laugh at a poor spirit. If you only knew what a treat this is for me!"

"Your very good health, then," said M. Zieba.

"Alas, that is, under the circumstances, a rather futile toast; a spirit's ideal cannot be good health."

"Why not?"

"When a man changes into a ghost his materiality leaves him. We have a head and that's all. But we have plenty of strength. I could crumple you up like a piece of paper, but I am a well behaved ghost and I don't like such brutal games."

"You prefer masquerading as Alexander the Great?"

"*Mundus vult decipi* . . . people love being deceived. You see, good spirits passed into the eternal chambers long ago; they go flying about over India and the Mediterranean and everywhere just as they choose. Do you imagine they would come at your call? You can whistle for them for a hundred years but you'll never get a glimpse of them. But we are allowed to imitate our great predecessors. I'm a specialist in Alexander the Great. I have a spirit friend who appears usually in the rôle of Napoleon; he had rather a lurid past and was run over by an automobile. Another's pet rôle is Dante. Think of it . . . Dante, and he was a clerk! Of course you all think you have got hold of the real article. A poet for instance will reel off some verse during a seance and you silly people think you have heard a posthumous work of the great writer's."

"How extraordinary!"

"Well, it's all right. Anyway you can do nothing about it."

"Will it always be thus?"

"It is in the nature of every one to imitate the great . . . by the way, could you pour me out a trifle more brandy? Oh! Oh! What was that? What is going on there?"

Zieba rose. The ghost was actually crying! and in his sobs, strange words were audible:

"Oh, merciful heavens! That is our wife. My God! After three years!" And the ghost vanished.

In came Madame Zieba.

"Are you quite mad?" she started in her best manner. "You are allowing us no sleep. Helusia is crying, poor child. She thinks you must be ill. What's that? Oh, brandy! So it is. . . . That's right. See what all happens when you think I'm safely tucked in bed! But I'll teach you, my man!"

"Oh, do stop it, for the Lord's sake!" Zieba was terrified.

"Stop it? Stop what? You go off to bed this minute, Sir!"

"All right, all right, dear. I'm going. B-but, please don't shout."

"Good night!"

"Good night!"

III

Early the next day, M. Zieba went to Solce, where he spent a quiet day and bought a new bottle of brandy. But on reaching home at night, the thought of the ghost occurred to him and he felt a desire to call him up. He sat down at the piano and waited.

Nothing happened. So he went and asked the landlady whether anyone would object to his making a little music so late at night. Then he came back and played. After a minute he asked:

"Hallo! Are you there?"

The piano strings sounded of themselves and a voice proceeded from the inside of the instrument:

"I am. Good evening! Sorry, I won't come out just yet

because it is too early: you could not see me. Where have you been all day?"

"I went to see a shoemaker. But something had happened to him. He was lying in bed, sick. I believe he was drunk."

"The pig! Do you wish me to stay here tonight? Or leave?"

"I should like you to leave me."

"Why? Have I offended or frightened you in any way?"

"Oh, no. I find you very agreeable, but I must say I found your conduct last night very strange. . . . Think for yourself what my feelings were when you disappeared so suddenly!"

"I could not help it. But, do let me stay here. I will give no sign of life."

"What good will that do me?"

"Do not forget the past."

"I have forgotten it."

The piano strings ceased humming. The ghost must be thinking things over.

"If you please, M. Zieba."

"Yes?"

"Do me a favour. Give me another tiny drop of brandy and I swear I will answer any question you like to put. Come, will you?"

"I positively refuse to pour brandy down the piano's back. It would not improve the strings."

"Oh, Lord!" exclaimed the ghost suddenly. "What's that on the electric lamp?"

M. Zieba lifted his eyes: there was the ghost sitting on the lamp. But he was not in the least afraid. He went on tiptoe to the door leading to the next room and cautiously applied his ear to it. Madame Zieba was combing her daughter's hair, but she had a fine hearing and perceived his approach.

"What's the matter?" she shouted.

"I believe there are thieves in the house."

"Well I never. . . . At any rate the cupboard in the next room is trembling and shaking as if there were a spirit in it."

"Shut up!" he retorted firmly. So firmly that the words stuck in the amazed Madame Zieba's mouth.

On the third day after this incident, Helusia was painting in water colours, a still life, the mother sewing up a hat and M. Zieba himself reading the paper, when a series of queer noises reached them from the room next door.

"My goodness! What's that?" exclaimed Madame in terror. M. Zieba's face became livid.

"Go and see. Don't stand there like a dummy!"

He was shaking all over.

"So you refuse to go?"

"Yes. I do," he answered.

"And . . . how is it there is that smell of brandy again? As if some had been spilled?"

M. Zieba was incapable of motion; he stood staring at the door of the terrible room in a visible state of fear.

"Tomorrow morning I shall take you to see a doctor," announced his wife.

Helusia cried a little, then went to sleep. Nervously, M. Zieba lit a cigar and went straight into the next room and blew several mouthfuls of smoke into the piano.

Madame Zieba looked on with increasing doubts as to her husband's sanity.

The voice started:

"M. Zieba!"

"Present!"

"I'll stand no opposition show in this house. Does anyone know I am here?"

"No."

"Well, go into the other room. I mean Helusia's."

"Why? What is the matter there?"

"Nothing much. . . . You'll see, however. I'll go in and you look through the keyhole."

M. Zieba wondered more and more. But he had the suggested peep. Horror! He beheld Helusia in the arms of a handsome artillery lieutenant. He felt like crying, but could not. He went into the room where the piano was and lay down on the sofa like a dead man.

The ghost promptly complained, "You have taken away the sofa from me."

M. Zieba looked in the direction of the voice with terrible anger.

"You brute! I'll kill you!"

"Better not try. It would not be so easy. Besides which I am boss here now. Don't you dare shout!"

M. Zieba faltered: "In her own room . . . in my house . . ." Which sounded as if all his objections would have been removed had he found her in the artillery lieutenant's room!

"I did not lie to you, did I?" said the ghost.

"Oh, Helusia! Helusia!" moaned the man.

"Your wife has paid for that!"

M. Zieba jumped up.

"My wife?"

"Follow me . . ."

In a dazed state like a hypnotic trance, he followed the spirit which now appeared to have assumed gigantic proportions.

"Open that door. Gently now! Don't make a noise!"

M. Zieba opened the door like a real burglar.

Her head tied up in a towel, Madame Zieba lay on her bed.

The ghost glided towards her, blew his cheeks out and spoke in such a frightful voice that M. Zieba nearly fainted. Simultaneously, some one ran out of Helusia's room in a great hurry and disappeared into the night. Madame spoke incomprehensible words, her lips moving very quickly. She looked like a strangled person and lay like a stone with her mouth gaping wide.

"Right!" said the spirit. M. Zieba prepared to leave the room. His wife looked at him as if he, too, were a ghost, but said nothing.

"What has happened to her?" he enquired gently.

"She is ill. She will remain ill for an hour at the most."

"How is that? . . . It will not kill her?"

"Of course not."

M. Zieba was looking so awed yet interested, that the ghost could not help laughing.

"Let's go and smoke a cigar," it said maliciously. "And tomorrow you can try the shoemaker again."

"You brute!" exclaimed M. Zieba. "I'll not let you out!"

He tried to catch the ghost, but all he caught was a peg of the hatstand that had seemed just in the middle of the ghost's figure. . . .

S

THE TREASURE OF ALMEIDA

By A. D'AGUILAR

ON a fine October evening I reached the Opera Comique to find an improvised illuminated announcement that, owing to the electricians' strike, there would be no performance. I was considerably annoyed and remarked to myself that the electricians of the central district might have chosen for their striking one of the evenings I spend in the bosom of my family. It would have been no inconvenience to them and it would have spared me the waste of an evening, the useless expense of a cab and of the laundering of half a dozen evening ties which I had crushed unmercifully owing to my inborn inaptitude for anything in the way of making neat bows.

Vexed at having been robbed of hearing the lyrical sighs of Madame Butterfly, I reached home still absorbed in my selfish thoughts, but found an immediate diversion on my arrival. Among the evening letters was one from my friend Baron de Lavollin, a country gentleman, announcing the death of his wife.

Our excellent relations, no less than social duty, imposed on me the obligation of rendering the last honours to the poor lady who, during her lifetime, had been so full of kindness towards me and mine on the frequent occasions when she insisted on our coming to shoot over their property.

So I busied myself getting ready for a journey of which I would not have dreamed had I been at the theater. The railway guide revealed that, by taking the Clermont-Ferrand express at half-past ten, I could manage to attend the funeral the next morning at nine. Doubtless I would be able to hire at the station some sort of conveyance to take me to Lavollin Castle.

Nor was I mistaken in my reckoning. The only thing was I was unexpectedly seized with a violent headache which, however, I dispelled with the aid of two tabloids of

pyramidon. These were courteously offered to me by a gentleman whom I found later on to be my neighbour at the funeral breakfast and who was introduced to me as a cousin of the deceased and member of Parliament for the division.

He appeared to be in the sixties and was a perfect type of the higher French bourgeoisie, with its prominent qualities, small faults and the inevitable red rosette in the buttonhole.

It being bad form to discuss the sad event at table, we discoursed, in very low tones, about a variety of subjects. The deputy turned out to be a conservative in politics and a catholic in his literary taste, points of view well suited to cement our instinctive mutual sympathy. On the whole, however, conversation flagged, which was not to be wondered at in the circumstances. There were long lapses of silence, one of which was broken by the deputy asking me politely whether the roads were still good in Portugal. Such a question, put by this serious looking man, in the very heart of France, in a purely French gathering, strange to business and particularly to foreign affairs, filled me with astonishment. It was only after a few moments that I found words for a simple question:

"Then you know our roads?"

"I went over them thirty-five years ago," he replied quietly, and added: "Do you like tales?"

"Who does not?"

"Well, on the way, I will tell you one that is really worth while. Are you agreeable to travel back to Paris in my automobile?"

I accepted his offer gratefully, not the least on account of the promised tale, and waited impatiently for the end of the meal, a thing of some duration as a rule in the country.

At last the interminable lunch came to an end and we filed into the big drawing room where the guests surrounded the master of the house, and took their farewell decorously, muttering some last words of condolence. We did likewise and then set off.

Although it was October, the temperature was quite mild, as soft indeed as in the month of May. The sun's yellow rays caressed with golden wand the forest flowers and grasses, last sad remains of summer. The car ran smoothly

though speedily, seeming to have haste to get away from this place where the shadow of death had passed.

"We are going to visit the church of my native village," announced the deputy.

"It is worth visiting then?"

"It is the church of Mezillon. There I was baptised, and thence I will in due course set out on my last journey, as did my father before me, a good and merry gentleman. Soldier, like all my ancestors, he had been all over France, but came back here to die of wounds got during the War of 1870. He lies in the very shadow of that church which is linked to our house by so many traditions that it almost seems part of it."

We were just arriving at the ancient and sober portal of the church when a little, lame man bearing a bunch of keys passed in front of us. The deputy was going to call out to him, but had no need, for as soon as he saw the car, he had stopped and taken off his hat in token of respect. While we halted, he enquired discreetly after the health of Monsieur le Depute, and mentioned the death of that poor Madame la Baronne, cut off in the flower of her age. "Just like the sister of Monsieur le Curé . . . he has gone off to Cernay to visit her grave."

"Monsieur le Curé is not here then? What a nuisance! I just wanted to show Monsieur here the jewel." He pointed to me as he spoke.

"If it is only the jewel, the presence of Monsieur le Curé is not essential, for I have all the keys. Monsieur le Depute knows I am a trustworthy man."

We got out of the car and entered the vestry. The beadle opened a big cupboard in which there glittered a modern casket. He opened it too, and took out a sheath of fine wood, the content of which compelled me to a cry of admiration.

The deputy, who seemed to be enjoying himself immensely, asked me with a smile:

"You know the style, don't you?"

"I know the original," I replied with a thrill of patriotic pride.

"This jewel is a perfect copy of the finest of the ecclesi-

astical ornaments of the sixteenth century in Portugal. It is an exact reproduction of the *cristode* of Belem."

"A copy, you say. Are you quite sure?"

"Absolutely positive."

"One more illusion vanished! I brought it myself from your country, despite enormous difficulties, and I presented it to this church many years ago. But I will tell you all about it. We had better set out now, so as to reach Paris before midnight."

Followed by the lame beadle, whom a tip of two francs had moved to a series of profound bows, we entered the comfortable limousine. The chauffeur sprang into his seat and we drove off.

As we were leaving the village, the deputy started his tale:

"As I have already told you, I come of a military family. My grandfather was a Brigadier General in Massena's army and was at one time governor of the fortress of Almeida in Portugal. You know the place?"

"Yes, by name. It is on the frontier, in the district of Guarda."

"That's it. He was left in full charge at Almeida while Massena was invading the country."

"Which turned out somewhat costly for him . . ."

"Quite. But please let me proceed. As I was saying, he was left to quiet garrison duties in Almeida, and started thinking about his private affairs, which were much less brilliant than his general's uniform. The net result of his cogitations was not, especially when measured by modern standards, of spotless honesty. But in those days men, and above all soldiers, from whom bravery was demanded rather than scruples, were not so particular. You follow me, my dear Sir?"

"Perfectly."

"Good! Following the ways of his time, the Napoleonic era, my grandfather took to plundering. And since the only places in that region where riches were to be found were the convents, he directed his attentions to convents. There was a certain trunk which was supposed to hold the pay for the brigade, but was chronically empty; he filled

it with golden incense burners. The manners of the times!

It was his intention to get the said iron trunk back to France under the escort of victorious bayonets, as so many others had done. But this simple plan was upset by the hazards of war. Massena's routed troops reappeared in Almeida in a state of indescribable disorder. My grandfather had to abandon the town and fly to Spain. Fearing his treasure might disappear in the confusion of the retreat, he came to the conclusion the best thing to do was to hide it. He would surely come back to Portugal, for Napoleon intended sending a powerful army or might even come in person to avenge this third disaster, as he had sent Massena to avenge the two previous ones.

Well, my dear Sir, you know what happened subsequently . . . the Russian campaign, the Grand Alliance. . . . So my grandfather died a poor man with nothing but the half-pay thrown at him by the restored Bourbons. My father inherited a house that was tumbling in ruins and the tale of a buried treasure, annotated in French with full details and a plan of Almeida dating from 1765.

Armed with this document, there could be no difficulty in finding the hiding place of the treasure; unless it had been discovered by chance the gold must still be there. But how to fetch it? Europe was full of unrest. Revolutions were the order of the day in France, in Spain, and even in Portugal. Nowhere was there security; nowhere were there safe means of communication. Besides, my father's sole linguistic equipment was French, and that was utterly insufficient for such a journey. He would say sometimes: 'Who knows whether in your day things will not be quieter? You must learn Spanish.' And so I did. When the War of 1870 broke out, I could speak Spanish quite correctly. My father was one of the first to march against the Prussians, and would have been one of the first to fall, if the bullet that wounded him mortally had not occasioned a long-drawn agony that lasted many months. Then the war came to an end: you remember how?"

"I should think I do. I can still hear the blind fools in Lisbon singing in the streets:

*O France! O France!
You have been very rash.
You are well on the way
To well deserved ruin.*

For with the exception of the intellectuals, Portugal was on the side of Prussia. With the course of the war, however, public opinion veered round to the French side, and has remained there firmly ever since."

In the stress of emotion, the deputy shook my hand, then proceeded:

"After the war, I was left alone, struggling with adversity to try and finish my studies. Lavollin's father helped me till I had been called to the Bar. A fat lawsuit in which I was fortunate enough to plead on the winning side furnished me with the means of seeking the treasure.

I left for Madrid with good letters of introduction and passed myself off there as an artist anxious to visit old Castile. I secured letters of introduction for every direction in order to hide my real destination, which was Ciudad Rodrigo, and went straight there, according to my pre-arranged plan.

Once there I produced an easel, spread a canvas on it and made some sort of a sketch on it. I knew just enough about drawing to deceive the simple-minded Castilians, who thought I was a bohemian painter.

'I am going into the country to look for subjects,' I explained. On the second day, I made the acquaintance of a very good fellow, the muleteer of a big flour mill. Little by little I got to know his character; after a week we were fast friends, so much so that I confided in him the real object of my journey to Castile.

He swore to observe secrecy without my asking him, and never was confidence in a man better justified.

We proceeded with the excursion to Almeida, and Juan—such was the muleteer's name—undertook to find a man who knew the frontier and the town we had to go to.

Over a month was spent in this preparatory work. In the end, in despair of securing a fitter person, we agreed to take on a Gypsy named Pablo, who frequented all the fairs on the frontier. He swore he knew Almeida inside out,

and doubtless that was true enough. We merely told him we intended a night expedition, without giving him further particulars, and set out, the three of us one morning, on foot, but with a mule in the pack of which a lever and a spade lay concealed. We arrived in Aldea del Obispo as night was falling and rested there.

When we set out again, crossing the frontier by the heights above the Val de la Mule, the night was pitch dark and full of imminent thunder. One could not see ten paces ahead.

We reached Almeida without being able to see the town walls. As we were going over the bridge that leads to the gates of Santa Cruz, I noticed that, despite all our care to muffle our march, the noise of our footsteps resounded under the vault of the gallery. I ordered Juan to stay behind with the mule and Pablo and I, walking on tiptoes, penetrated into the gallery. I fancied I heard voices and wanted to make sure whether there was any one there who might notice us. And I had not been mistaken. On the other side of the gate, in the very center of a little square, I could discern the outline of some people talking loudly and animatedly.

We squeezed ourselves against the wall and waited.

After a short time, one of the shapes left. Loud laughter and facetious remarks from the remainder followed him for a long while.

One voice shouted: 'Eh Coleu! Coleu!'

I remember that name clearly to this day, just as I heard it then, because of its distinct French sound. Am I mistaken, or is such a name known in Portugal?"

"It is. In fact, it happens to be the name of a well known journalist."

"Could it have been he?"

"Perhaps."

"He whom they called Coleu replied with three words I could not make out, but which Pablo, whispering into my ear, told me meant goodnight. From which I concluded he was leaving them and that the others would not be long in seeking shelter from the approaching storm. We had not long to wait. Without stopping their con-

versation, the men slowly drew away and disappeared for good.

I called Juan and we went in. Just to the right was a barrier that led to the wall and Pablo took us through it, according to my instructions to lead us to Santa Barbara. Following the outside wall, we went round half the town without hearing a single voice or seeing a single light. The silence was complete save for the wind rustling in the trees. Suddenly, Pablo pointed to a ruined building of sorts, and said: "There is Santa Barbara."

Somewhat moved, I approached and reconnoitred the outside. The main outline coincided with the drawing of my grandfather, which was clearly imprinted in my memory. I lit our lantern and, alone, sought for the one and only door. Just as in the plan, this door proved to be on the one side and gave no direct access to the chapel.

It led to a kind of antechamber that had apparently been built as a screen to the sanctuary itself. It ran eastwards and had a door in front of the now crumbled altar. I examined this door with the lantern and found that the unusual outward disposition of the lintels corresponded with the remarks on the plan.

No further doubt was possible. It was here that the General had concealed his treasure.

I was choking with excitement, almost paralysed indeed. Just as I was at last about to call in my companions, the first stroke of lightning revealed Pablo's head. The fellow was spying on me from the exterior doorway.

I made no comment, but invited him in. I showed both of them the joints in the hearthstone. Time had weakened them, and they yielded to the first efforts with the lever.

As soon as we could get a grip for our fingers in the opening, we all three put forth a mighty effort and drew the stone towards us, exposing the trunk to view.

The fall of the stone created a draught that put out the lantern. As I was searching for a box of matches in my pocket, Juan struck a light. It revealed Pablo hurriedly concealing some object he had endeavored to draw from his belt during the short interval of darkness.

That was the second time I had observed a suspicious

move from that quarter. I grew anxious, but succeeded in concealing my feelings and helped to fasten the trunk on to the pack of a mule.

In order to get an opportunity to inform Juan of my suspicions, I sent Pablo outside the chapel to make sure there was no one about. Juan, I found, was as much on his guard as I was. Unfortunately we had no time to concert a defensive plan of action, for the Gypsy came back almost at once, assuring us everything was safe, but urging us to lose no time in making our way cautiously out by the Santo Antonio gates, the nearest to us.

I remembered these gates on the 1765 map and endorsed the advice. I cannot conceive why I did not oppose this unnecessary variation when we might have just retraced our footsteps along paths we had already trod and which were known to us. I suppose fate decreed it should be so. Later on I acquired the conviction that, had we gone out by the Santa Cruz gate, we would have avoided the terrible tragedy of which I was both a witness and an actor.

We left the stone where it had fallen, went out of the chapel and proceeded along the walls in the same direction as formerly, that is to say, continuing our journey round the town which, by the way, seemed on this side even more deserted and solitary, likewise more wretched. The lightning showed nothing but old buildings with tumbled-in roofs of a most desolate aspect.

Never, my dear Sir, will I forget this ominous vision of this sad burgh, that seemed to be asleep for all eternity!

The gallery of the Santo Antonio gate appeared to me to be even vaster than that of Santa Cruz, and the thunder reverberated through it with terrifying noise.

At the outlet, instead of a bridge, we only found a steep path leading down into the ditch. There must have been another just opposite climbing up the other bank, but one could not see; the rain was being whipped by the storm straight into our faces, forcing us to close our eyes.

We dared not advance further, not knowing whither we were going. Even the mule, seized with fear, refused to budge, and Pablo, out of his reckoning, had lost the confident air with which he had guided us till then.

We wandered about, lost in the storm, for an hour, a century rather, turning round the exterior bastion, half buried in mud, half drowned in torrential rain, dazed by the incredible roar of the thunderstorm, then at its height.

Finally, heaven alone knows how, we found the barrier whither we climbed at a run, as if afraid to see it disappear, dooming us to stay on forever in the muddy ditch.

The weather did not abate, and my suspicion of the Gypsy returned to me. As we filed out of the fortified zone, grasping my revolver under my sodden coat, I demanded to know from him whither we were to go now.

He seemed to hesitate, and when his answer came, one could feel the hidden treachery in it. But what could we do? The confounded darkness favoured his designs.

He led us into a hollow way the outlet of which proved to be a river; I was almost certain it was the same river we had crossed on the way to the chapel, near the Val de la Mule, but very much swollen by the rains.

Yet there was an element of doubt in my mind; on the return journey we had gone steadily downhill, while, coming, the way had been over flat country. How was this to be accounted for?

The Gypsy explained volubly. He pretended he had led us by the shortest road, avoiding villages and custom houses. This river was indeed the one we had crossed the day before, and, were it not for the flood which made the ford impassable, we should already be over on the other side, safe on Spanish territory.

I was indeed anxious to reach Spain in order to pay him off, if necessary using force to get rid of him.

The Gypsy maintained that we should be able to cross by the ford without danger in the early morning, so the best thing would be to camp where we were. The rain was diminishing in intensity, and there was below us a natural shelter formed by two rocks leaning against each other like playing cards. This cavern was big enough to receive the three of us, but I alone remained inside, with the trunk which we had taken off the mule's back in order to give the animal a rest.

Contrary to my expectation, the Gypsy made no demur.

He even helped Juan to light a fire in order to dry our sodden coats, but, this done, he did not remain near the embers, but started studying the lay of the ground, near the river, climbing up to the prominent heights. I did not let him out of my sight. His gropings and searchings, his hesitant steps, his unconscious gestures, all indicated he was brewing treason.

At last he came back to warm himself at the fire. Crouching down like Juan, he was at first silent. Then he started speaking, spasmodically as if throwing sentences to the wind, however, for all the effect they seemed to have on his companion. For a long while he spoke on, then, doubtless exasperated by Juan's serene silence, he got excited and indulged in angry, vehement reproaches I could guess at though I could not understand them.

Juan listened without looking at him, and shook his head negatively. In the yellow, flickering light of the fire, one could read the indignation on his face, while on Pablo's evil intentions were clearly marked.

Instinctively, I drew near. . . . In that very moment, Pablo was taking an enormous Catalan knife out of his belt; he made signs with it in the direction of my shelter. Juan, white with excitement, sought to reach unnoticed his jacket pocket, but the Gypsy divined his intention and leaped at him like a great cat, stabbing him furiously.

It was all clear to me; my faithful friend was going to pay the price of life for his loyalty. But, despite the unexpectedness of the onslaught, and the inferiority of his kneeling position, he was defending himself by means of his heavy mantle that caught up most of the blows the traitor was raining on him with increasing rage.

Now advancing, now retreating, he sought to penetrate under the cloak. At this awful sight I gave no thought to my revolver, but made a grab at the armed wrist of the Gypsy. He swung round and seized me by the throat with his right hand, which, inexperienced in this kind of fighting, I had left unsecured. I fell helplessly, but brought Pablo down with me, who, in the instant of falling, shouted a blasphemous curse and let go my throat to roll away, Juan's knife firmly planted in his ribs. I jumped to my

feet beside Juan, whom my diversion had saved. The Gypsy lay on the ground, breathing heavily. After a few moments of stupor, it occurred to both of us at the same time to see what we could do for him. Juan withdrew his knife from the wound and placed his hand over the man's heart, but, with the savage spring of a wounded tiger, the Gypsy drew himself up and plunged up to the hilt in Juan's breast the dagger he had throughout held in his hand. . . .

Poor boy! I had intended bringing him back to France with me, and here he lay, struggling in death agonies in my arms, stretching out towards me hands proffered in supreme farewell.

What followed will haunt me always. I feared to see myself dragged before the criminal courts of a strange land and determined to hide the bodies. This fear inspired me with a physical energy I should have been incapable of in normal circumstances.

With a superhuman effort I dragged the trunk outside, lit the lantern, seized the spade, and, with a prayer on my lips—for, you know, my dear Sir, I am a devout Catholic . . .” I nodded.

“Yes . . . I am. And all the prayers of my childhood streamed back to my memory. I prayed hard, then I started digging. I dug to such good purpose that, after having dragged the two bodies along and laid them down one on top of the other, there was still enough room left for the trunk. I had resolved to bury it with its two victims, for it had at last dawned on my Christian consciousness that the origin of its coveted wealth was sacrilegious. The sin of my grandfather in stealing the sacred vessels would fall back on me and make me anathema if I persisted in my original purpose. In allowing the awful events I had just witnessed, Providence had clearly shown its hand.

So it was without regrets that I lifted the trunk by one of its corners and threw it on top of the bodies. The rusty lock burst with the shock of the fall and the lid flew off, the grave being flooded with the richest collection of religious gold plate you could imagine.

The solid gold, studded with precious stones, represented a considerable intrinsic value, but its artistic and collector's worth was inestimable. Already in the days of my youth, rich amateurs competed passionately for the acquisition of such artistic rarities, and nowadays they would have constituted a truly amazing fortune.

Among these precious objects, one drew my special attention."

"The *cristode* of Mezellon?"

"Precisely. I decided to take it and give it to the church of my native village as a votive offering for my miraculous escape from imminent death. The object being thus restored to its original usage, there could be no sacrilege in so doing.

So I took it away and put it in the mule's pack. Then I went back, filled the hole with all the earth it would hold and trod it down with my feet. What was over I threw into the river, together with the lever and the spade, so that no trace of my work should be left. The storm had increased in violence during this funereal incident. One would have thought night was determined to persist to its very end with the tragic horrors that had marked its course.

Worn out with the emotion no less than with the physical exertion, I picked up the pack and was just about to seek the mule in order to leave the place when a dazzling flash of lightning surrounded me, followed by a stunning clap of thunder; I was dazed and lost consciousness.

When I recovered my senses it was daylight. My eyes happened to wander towards the place where I had hurled the bodies. Wonder of wonders! The rock had disappeared. The thunderbolt that had knocked me into a faint had split it in two and the halves lay flat side by side like two great stone flags. The raging elements had thus put up an eternal gravestone to the two Spaniards and put the treasure forever beyond the reach of human cupidity.

Had Providence not watched over me, these same stones would have served me as a mausoleum also.

I found the mule peacefully tied and busy munching

some comparatively dry thistles. I seized its reins and left this accursed place, following the river in search of a ford.

After half an hour's walk I met a boat. The boatman could hardly make out my Spanish, but he grasped my desire to cross over to the other side, and embarked me and my mule with every imaginable care. On arrival I gave him one *douro*, which he refused, alleging this was far too great a remuneration. '*Mucho! Muchol*' he shouted, doubtless thinking me a Spaniard and perhaps deaf into the bargain. As he had no change and I had no smaller coin I left him without paying anything at all; he cried out a hearty, friendly '*Va com Deus*' after me. On this as on many another occasion, I was able to contrast the nobility of sentiment of your peasants with the grasping nature of ours.

I rode through hilly country for two hours without meeting a living soul. At last I reached a village and there, in the one and only inn of the place, I realised that in crossing the river I had simply gone deeper into Portugal instead of, as I imagined, getting into Spain. It was the good folk of the inn who explained this to me, what time I was sating myself on some fried, salted sardines, the memory of which fills me with regrets to this day after thirty-five years! It may be this impression was enhanced by the affable manner in which they were served, on the best Sunday white earthenware crockery. What excellent people these were!

While eating my sardines and talking, I had thus a second occasion (the encounter with the boatman having been the first) of meeting your compatriots and the kindness I there experienced never deserted me during my journey from the border to the sea. Portuguese goodness of heart has indeed no limits.

In the hospitable inn I reached the conclusion that the Gypsy's crime had been premeditated ever since we had set out from Almeida. Otherwise he would not have led us to the banks of the Coa, as I learned the river was called on the banks of which lay buried the treasure of Almeida. I suppose it would really be the Coa?"

"Possibly," I answered, "I am not strong in geography."

Four leagues from the inn of the sardines, lay the town of Guarda, I was informed. Being a town, great or small, there would probably be some place there where I could rest for a few days and buy a few absolute necessities.

So it turned out. I put up at the inn in the shadow of the ancient cathedral and, one fine morning, with the jewel packed in my valise, and feeling in fairly good spirits, I took my seat in the *char-a-banc* of the local *hirer* and proceeded to Mangualde. You see my memory is not bad! Thence I took the diligence for Manhada, where I struck the railway line.

But the splendid macadam roads, every whit as good as those of France, winding amid beautiful and picturesque scenery, filled me with such enthusiasm that I disdained the railway and continued my way to Lisbon per *char-a-banc*.

I stopped in Coimbra and spent the night here and there in various places. Everywhere was I received in the same simple and affectionate manner.

I arrived in Lisbon delighted with my journey and full of love for Portugal, a land more devout and sweet than any I know of. It was inevitable that I should, many a time, recall the dramatic close of my expedition, as unforeseen and improbable as one of Conan Doyle's stories. But my nerves had been so shaken by the experiences of that night that I had no pleasure in the remembrance. In Lisbon, the French Consul, on seeing my identity papers, readily granted me a passport with which I embarked on a Messageries Maritimes steamer.

From Bordeaux I reached home safely. I made my confession to the priest, and, with the Bishop's approval, fulfilled my vow and presented the jewel to the church.

Then I set to work with a will. I got on at the Bar, I attained some success in politics. In the main I have been happy.

Every year on the fateful anniversary, I cause a Mass to be sung, and I pray for the souls of the dead—of both of them, as befits Christian charity.

Such is my tale, and such my reason for enquiring as to the state of the roads in Portugal."

The deputy stopped speaking. I reflected on the wonderful chain of circumstances that had led this man to undertake a great journey and to sacrifice two lives in order to attain so burlesque a result as the unearthing of a trunk and its immediate burial again. I concluded that fate is stronger than the will of men, due to the fact that, whereas they often show themselves pusillanimous when faced with the forces of nature, whereas fate is always adamant.

I might have long continued my speculative dreaming, had the beauty of the countryside we were passing through not drawn my attention to that very nature that formed the subject of my meditation.

The day was drawing to its close. In the twilight, the rosy tints were disappearing, becoming covered with dark spots, translucent at first, and gradually thickening. The houses of red brick with roofs of bluish-grey tiles took on violet shades. The horizon was darkening, causing the trees of far-off forests to become blurred and lost. A round, clear, metallic moon was rising, spreading light over the sky. The car was rolling on at top speed now. The villages looked like moving groups coming up to meet us and becoming suddenly fixed behind us, like useless things thrown out on to the road. Woods, hillocks, plains, all vanished. The car, racing now up, now down, gave one the vague feeling of being rocked on the earth itself, Mother Earth, fertile and full of treasures for those who tear and toil with spade and plough, treasures incomparably greater than that which rests by the banks of the Coa, under two slabs of rock, on a litter of human bones.

IN THE WINTER OF WAR

By Her Majesty, MARIE, QUEEN OF RUMANIA

NIGHT had fallen. A piercing wind blew over the countryside. It was biting cold. The stars were shining far up in the infinite, as if trying to withdraw as far as possible from the cold on earth. The snow glistened. Every now and then little clouds of it whirled up and were swept along by the hurricane as if seeking shelter.

A desolate night, a dark night, a night of ghosts and apparitions. With the moaning of the wind came sinister sounds—the rumbling of the cannon which, in the distance, announced the approaching battle.

By the edge of the road which was scarcely noticeable in the darkness except as a black stripe on the white snow sullied by footprints, a few soldiers were huddling together around a dying fire.

It seemed as though the storm were singling them out, heaping snow over them as the salt spray washes the rocks. The soldiers had pulled their coat collars up over their ears and their *colbak* down over their eyes, but neither coats nor *colbak* could protect them from the fury of the blizzard.

There were about a dozen men. Four of them, old men with grey beards, and one young man, guarding a group of prisoners, tattered, sad looking and resigned, squatting around the last remains of a fire. They sat with heads bowed down over drawn-up knees, hiding their faces not only from the snow, but from the eyes which pitied and despised them at the same time.

Their hands were numbed and cracked. The guards scarcely noticed them. Their words, swept off by the wind, did not get beyond the youngest who was resting against his rifle like a shepherd on his stick. He was a youth of some eighteen or nineteen years and he stared out into the night with a dreamy expression in his large blue eyes.

The snow kept falling everywhere, on the fur of the *colbak*, on the rough eyebrows, obliging the men to pass their hands, every now and then, across their faces.

"Vasile, the fire is going out," one of the old men mumbled sourly, "and in this cursed night we will all die of cold."

"Suppose we lose the way?" another murmured.

"How could we?" Andrei Scurtu, head of the little detachment, queried. He was like his name—laconic—and he always contradicted his subordinates.

"Would you have us march on with the prisoners, with frozen feet? We should have reached the village before nightfall! It makes you ill . . ."

"If we stay here, in the cold, till the break of dawn, there won't be many of us left. And the fault will be neither ours nor God's."

"Whose will it be then?"

"The fault of the war," said old Petrea Pascu, who had not opened his mouth so far.

"The war, the war," murmured Scurtu, "the war comes and kills like a dry summer, it sweeps away like a flood which plays havoc with sprouting seeds."

"Especially a war like this one," another ventured.

"Our enemies are like demons," said a third, trying in vain to stir up the fire.

"To the devil with them," Scurtu exclaimed, and to add extra force to his words, he blew on the fire.

Vasile turned his youthful face toward the old man.

"I pity the prisoners."

"Pity?" several hostile voices cried out at the same time. "Pity on these foreign dogs!"

"They're young and far from home," Vasile explained timidly.

"And we, where are we?"

"We're still in our own land."

"It's not due to them that we're still here!"

For a few moments everything was silent.

"This is a night for wolves."

"A devil's night."

"A night of death."

"Vasile, we'll freeze if we don't get wood," Scurtu said again.

"And where is wood to be found in this desert?" Vasile asked, still resting on his rifle.

"Your legs are young and strong," said Petrea Pascu, "and the night . . . the night isn't so dark."

"It isn't so dark because the snow is white," explained a soldier on the other side of the fire.

"A devil's night," another repeated, sighing.

"Vasile, your legs are young," Petrea Pascu said again. Scurtu was trying to light a cigarette. He looked up.

"It's true, Vasile, your legs are young. Why don't you go and look for wood?"

"I'm here to watch the prisoners," said Vasile, hard and yet quivering.

"Let the dogs watch them," Scurtu cried, "and remember that I'm in command!" A hoarse laugh rang out.

"Wouldn't your father be proud if he could see you now!"

"Let the old man rest in peace! He was young in his day and had many children, many boys."

"And what became of them?"

Scurtu shrugged his shoulders and made a gesture with his hand.

"Only God and the war can say . . . and the Germans," he said vaguely, after a pause.

"They know how to fight," said one.

"They're the devil's seed," said another.

"Maybe. But their cannon would be useful, if we had them," Scurtu mumbled after having lighted, with infinite pains, his miserable cigarette.

"Don't you hear them?" Vasile asked.

"To the devil with them," several voices cried in chorus, and then all was silent. Only the howling of the wind broke the silence of the night. Again Petrea Pascu urged Vasile to seek wood, repeating that he had good legs and that somewhere there must be wood, and the night was not too dark.

"If we don't get wood to keep the fire going, we will all be dead before morning."

Scurtu nodded approvingly with his head.

"Take your gun, Vasile, and go and look for wood. There ought to be some, some place."

Vasile shrugged his shoulders.

"If you really want me to go," and he fastened his rifle to his belt and without saying another word he went off, to find, in the snow, the path which would lead him to some wood for the fire.

The night was deep, the country deserted . . . not a house was to be seen, not a tree, not a hedge . . . not even a wooden well.¹ . . . Where was he to find some wood?

And seeking wood Vasile started out resignedly, into the infinite night.

As he trudged along, in the darkness, Vasile was plunged into a thousand thoughts, vague, indefinite thoughts and visions, happy visions which had nothing to do with winter and snow.

He saw a fertile valley through which ran a long, dusty road leading to a village half hidden behind fruit-laden trees.

In the sunset a herd of cattle were being driven home by a boy who carried a green rod in his hand.

The boy was humming a *doina*,² slow and melancholy, always the same.

And unconsciously Vasile's lips tried to hum it but they were numbed by the cold and only a few hoarse sounds rang into the night.

The shepherd, however, rambled along, winding his way toward the setting sun, and the dust of the road fell on his cheeks and his hands.

The road was long, but he was not in a hurry; neither he nor his animals heeded the passing of time. . . .

He adorned his stick with flowers and threw it, every now and then, into the air, still humming the *doina*.

A group of children and a litter of little black pigs came out to meet him. The little pigs had soft curly tails and

¹ A well with a long perch or pole.

² *Doina*—A Rumanian popular song, a song of sorrow, nostalgia and sadness.

funny minuscule snouts; the children were babbling and half naked, with nothing on but shirts.

In front of the house great pyramids of pumpkins were heaped high and rows of red peppers hung over the doors.

A cloud of dust and a peaceful happiness hung over the village. Everything was serene, quiet, and in his thoughts the boy met his love. . . .

Vasile slipped in the darkness and it was with difficulty that he climbed to his feet. He was not hurt, for the snow was deep, but the sweet visions were dispersed and once more he was seized by the biting cold of the night, while the rumble of the cannon, in the distance, brought him back to reality. "Wood—I must find some wood," he muttered. "God! What a night! The wind stings like a whip and the snow pricks like the needles of a pine tree. Where in the devil can I find wood?"

He stopped and tried to rub his hands together, to get warm. In the darkness of the night he had not been able to follow the road and he had gone ahead, blindly.

He could not see anything. Here and there were foot-prints in the snow, and shapeless mounds which might be a heap of stones, a dead horse, or a bundle of hay. In that solitude they might also have a more sinister meaning—everything was possible, in war time.

Vasile shrugged his shoulders and again the vision of the peaceful village came back. Again he saw the pyramids of yellow pumpkins and, behind a hedge, a girl's silvery voice took up the refrain of the *doina* the boy was humming.

"But I must find wood!" he cried, driving away all thoughts of the peaceful village. "The others are shivering with the cold and I can't stay here all night."

In looking around it seemed to him he saw a dark stripe which must be the road, and he thought it would be easier to follow it.

With much difficulty he tried to plod along the path. The earth was frozen hard, he was tired and his feet were numb.

Suddenly he stopped. What was it? Three appalling figures next to one another—three ghosts—three lonely

skeletons in the dark night! His heart began to thump wildly, the sweat broke out on his hands. What was it? What a cursed and silent night! But why be afraid? Ghosts are ghosts, of course, but it would be much worse to meet a German! And yet at that moment Vasile didn't know whether in the bottom of his heart he would not have preferred meeting a German.

Fighting off his fear, he went toward the three ghosts. They remained motionless and allowed him to approach.

Three crosses! Three solitary wooden crosses, lashed by the wind! Three forgotten graves.

Vasile unconsciously made a sign of the cross and mumbled a prayer for the dead. Then he stood gazing at the three lonely crosses, wondering what had happened to those for whom they were erected.

Were these soldiers' graves? Or women's graves? Or children's graves, perhaps? So many little children died from hunger and cold. Since the beginning of the war, how many children died from hunger and cold!

Suddenly he realised that the crosses were of wood, of solid, heavy wood. And was he not looking for wood?

Like a man who stands and gazes at a suddenly discovered treasure, so rare that he doesn't dare seize it, Vasile remained before the crosses, fascinated. He did not dare touch them and yet he could not move away.

A terrible temptation came over him: why not take one of the crosses and carry it away to revive the dying fire?

When you come down to it, the dead are dead! Their slumber is so deep that they no longer know what goes on above them! Thank God, indeed, that they sleep so deeply, for otherwise, how could one dare think such thoughts?

Stepping closer he put his hand out to seize the first cross. At the same time his conscience smote him. No! It would be a sacrilege. The dead must be respected as much as the living. God and men would punish such an action; the dead cannot defend themselves and their graves are like altars—they must be respected. You cannot lay hands on a cross, on the last tribute raised to a man, whom someone on earth loved.

But then temptation took the upper hand.

The dead are dead, their troubles are over, while at this very moment men are freezing for lack of wood, brave men who are doing their duty. Better rob the dead than let the living perish—brave men, defending their country!

If the dead could speak they would surely be the first to tell him to carry the cross away—all three crosses!—to warm those who are defending their country, the brave men who are dying of cold.

With a violent gesture Vasile seized the first cross and tried to pull it out of the frozen soil. The cross resisted, it resisted like a tree whose roots were deeply planted, like a human creature bent on defending a plot of holy land. The blood rushed to Vasile's head. The obstacle he met awakened in him the fighter's instinct hidden in every man.

The obstinate cross now had a man to conquer.

And the strangest battle began on the deserted field. The wind howled, it sounded like a chorus of furies who had been set loose, and Vasile tugged! The inert wood opposed with almost human resistance and he made desperate efforts to overcome as if it were an enemy he fought.

With both hands clasped around the cross, as around a man, Vasile wrenched and shook the obstinate effigy which refused to yield to his strength. The sweat pearly out on his cheeks like raindrops, he took off his *colbak* and threw his rifle on the ground with resolute anger, and Vasile fought and struggled with all his might.

And all at once the cross gave way—so suddenly that Vasile, too, fell over and lay stretched out by the defeated enemy!

With his eyes still blinded by the effort he lay gasping, and each breath was like a sob. The wind whizzed around him and scourged his face with needles of broken ice.

But he had won, at last! The cross had been torn down, he had found wood for the living to burn. Everything was well, everything.

The fire had gone out, no embers, even, glowed any more and all talking had ceased. The prisoners and their guards, grouped dumbly around the ashes, looked like

heaps of rags. In that sad night it was almost impossible to distinguish one from the other.

Through the darkness they heard a sound, a sound of some one approaching.

For a while they could see nothing and then suddenly Vasile appeared, dragging along a heavy black object, like a shadow.

Wood!

A cry of joy rose from the breasts of those who lay numbed around the cold ashes, a cry of indescribable relief rang from the torpid throats, to greet Vasile's return. Some of them tried to get to their feet, seeking their rifles, but their frozen hands were clumsy.

Vasile did not speak. He was out of breath. His return through the darkness had been a struggle—a struggle with the wind, the snow and the ice—and above all a battle with his own conscience—and that was why he did not speak. He let the cross fall at the feet of those who were waiting.

Scurtu was the first to realise what sort of wood it was and a cry of blame came across his lips.

"It's a cross," he muttered, "a cross . . . a cross!" The others got up to look at the long-desired wood and all remained dumbfounded.

Even the prisoners raised their heads and looked at the others in surprise. Vasile remained silent, overcome by fatigue.

"A cross!" cried Scurtu. "How insane to bring a cross!"

"It'll burn, and we're freezing," one of the men ventured.

"No matter what happens, we can't burn a cross."

"It would be a great sin."

"God would punish us."

"We would be cursed even in our graves."

"But we are freezing, and the dead are dead."

"Do you think the dead will be any warmer because we suffer from the cold?"

"We have to defend our country."

"And think of all the graves without crosses!"

"What a pity! Who would dare burn it?"

Such were the words that fell, almost simultaneously, from all lips. Only Vasile and the prisoners remained

silent. The young man felt covered with shame and sin, but what ought he to have done? There was no other wood.

The voices, sometimes loud and sometimes low, crossed each other like angry forerunners of dispute. The wind, in its wildness, drowned them—poor human voices!

"I won't have it," Scurtu cried angrily. "Even if we must all die from the cold, and I with you, it would be better than to burn the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

Scurtu looked sternly at his companions. The snow covered him from head to foot, his face seemed older and was livid with the cold, he beat his arms together, trying to keep warm, but as he was the head of the detachment neither prayers nor cries could make him yield and change his mind. Death rather than commit the sin of burning the cross of the Redeemer.

Silence fell over the group of shivering men. Clinging together like a flock of lost sheep, their shoulders high up over their heads, they lay over by the cold ashes like dead. Suffering next to suffering, enemy next to enemy—there was no difference between them. They were nothing but men before God and the horror of the storm. A little to one side Vasile sat with his head resting on the cross he had carried back with such pains. He could not fall asleep.

Although the cold had numbed his brain—none too active at best—he was, nevertheless, tormented by the problems of life.

Why the war? Why all this suffering, this cold, these sacrifices, when life could be so simple? Why, why, why? Why is God in His heaven, so far away? Why all these thoughts, this confusion of ideas and prejudices which have no clear meaning nor any immediate utility? Why death and all these horrors? Why, why?

Why does winter follow summer? Why distance and desire? Why so many things that never come back? Why? Why?

Vasile could not understand.

He sat up, resting on an arm, and tried to gaze into the distance: why was the night so dark?

What was the meaning of light and dark?

But down over there, there seemed to be a light. Perhaps dawn was breaking? Perhaps the long vigil of death was over?

Vasile stood attentive with his eyes fastened on the distant light. Was it the sunrise? Maybe. No, it wasn't rising, it was moving . . . it moved! and it came along the road!

When daylight broke and Vasile told the others what he had seen, they, who had slept, would not believe him. And yet they had slept, while he was awake.

But such is man: as incredulous as Saint Thomas, who would not believe in anything unless he could touch it.

Over the snow, coming toward him, Vasile saw a white figure surrounded by light—and it, too, was all light. It was so brilliant that Vasile could not understand that the others did not wake up.

A long, brilliant trail followed the moving figure—a road of glory trod by holy feet—for the one who walked over the snow was the Son of Man, was the Son of God. . . . He came out of the night, He, a radiant figure. Vasile fell on his knees and took off his *colbak* and folded his hands in prayer.

All suffering was forgotten. All the struggle, the doubts, the questions which weighed so heavily on his heart, were forgotten. He was only a sentinel in the night, a lost child whom God came to see. His whole soul was wrapped in ecstasy, for the Son of Light had come to him, Vasile, who had stolen a cross off a grave!

But what was the Son of God carrying on His shoulders? A dark, heavy and cumbersome object.

The cross! Jesus was carrying His cross. Why? Oh, why?

He walked lightly over the snow. The cross did not seem heavy for Him to carry. Vasile still felt, in his shoulders, the weight of the cross he had been carrying.

The luminous figure did not stop before the young soldier, but Vasile's eyes were filled with a dazzling, celestial sensation as He passed quietly by the spot where the young man was kneeling.

He went right up to where the soldiers were sleeping, stepped into their midst and Vasile saw—saw with his own eyes—how the Son of God threw His cross on the dark ashes while suddenly a glorious flame burst out, enveloping the cross until the cross, the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ was nothing but a huge, living torch!

Jesus had carried His Cross, had carried it to relight the fire, that these miserable human beings should not perish!

Vasile still remembered, but confusedly, what had happened. He remained kneeling as long as the flame lasted, and then he fell and forgot everything, near the saving fire.

Day had come. One by one the soldiers and prisoners awoke and oh, miracle! the cold ashes of the night were red and glowing, and a blessed fire sent out warmth. A living fire—the freezing cold was nothing but the nightmare of a terrible past.

Each man woke up slowly, gently, from the realm of dreams and felt that a miracle had taken place. They felt their bodies warmed and their souls suffused with an indescribable joy. Even the pale faces of the prisoners shone with a strange light, almost of delight.

In a gruff voice, trying to threaten him, Scurtu called Vasile. Hadn't he disobeyed orders? He had burned the cross while his chief was sleeping! No. The cross was still there, lying like a dead body, with outstretched arms, and near the heavy wood Vasile was kneeling, in the snow, his hands joined in prayer, gazing at the rising sun.

And Scurtu, too, made a sign of the cross.

"Vasile," he called, "Vasile, what do you see, tell me, what do you see in the rising sun?"

Vasile turned to him with ecstatic eyes, but he did not answer.

And Scurtu never learned what vision Vasile saw as he gazed at the rising sun.

THE VIOLONCELLO

(SOUVENIRS)

By J. A. BRATESCO-VOINESTI

THE first thing my eyes fell upon, when I entered the lumber room, filled with all kinds of disused objects, was the violoncello. With two broken strings, that hung disconsolately at one side, and its bridge twisted sideways, it lay in a corner, dusty and abandoned.

I went towards it and tapped my finger on its resonant belly; then I tried to throw off the emotion that came over me, and I moved here and there about the room, trying to remember with what intention I had come there. My efforts were frustrated, however, by the memories that centered round the violoncello, which for the moment filled my entire thought.

After seeking a clue vainly for some time, I turned to leave the room, and I was in the act of crossing the threshold when I suddenly remembered what I had come for: it was my rod and line, which were behind the door. I took them and went down to the river. . . .

And now, while the float is dancing on the water, I will allow myself to dwell again on the memories of the past.

Forty years ago there were few houses where so much music was heard as in ours. With the exception of my father, who could not sing or play a note, although he was very fond of music, all the grown-up members of the family were musicians. My mother played the piano, one of her sisters sang, a brother played the violin, while the other, Uncle Alexander, hummed and whistled by heart, from beginning to end and without a mistake, sonatas, rhapsodies and operas. I believe he would even have been capable of whistling them backwards.

Twice a week invariably, while some of our old friends played whist in one room, there was music in the little

salon that adjoined it. It was there, when I was quite little, that I heard Dumitrache Floresco sing his "Stelutza,"¹ while accompanying himself on the piano.

We children were allowed to be present on these musical evenings. We remained quietly in a corner, kept in order on the one hand by the vigilance of the governess, and on the other by the taming influence which music exercises even on the most savage beasts, but above all by the gesticulations of Uncle Alexander, who acted as musical director, and whose eccentric movements we followed with close attention.

It would have been only natural that at least one of the children should have learnt to play an instrument, but my mother, terrorised at the thought of the fate that had befallen her brother, opposed every suggestion of this kind with all her strength. This brother of my mother had gone abroad to study law. He returned home after an absence of five years, but instead of being qualified to practice as a lawyer, he proudly displayed a diploma conferred on him by a conservatoire of music, testifying that he was entitled to describe himself as a professor of the violin.

After spending some time as the spoiled darling of the drawing rooms of that period in Bucharest, he was appointed to the post of prefect in one of the departments of the Rumanian province of Oltenia. He was removed on a change in the Government, and was then obliged, by necessity, to accept the subordinate post of sub-prefect in another department. Having made a love match with a penniless girl, he had an army of children, and at the period of which I have spoken he was living in poverty, overwhelmed with the burden of his large family, in an obscure sub-prefecture in the remotest depths of the provinces.

Music, my mother insisted, had been the cause of all this trouble; and, fearing that a similar fate to that of her brother might befall one of us, she forbade any of us to come near a piano or touch a keyboard.

¹The title of a song by this composer, which had a great success at the time and which soon became popular.

To our protests and to those of the rest of the family she replied:

"It must not be! Art enslaves men and effeminates them. I do not want what has happened to my brother Nicolas to happen to them. . . . They will have plenty of time later on, if they still want to, to learn music; but let them first finish their schooling!"

And that is why, in a house full of musicians, not one of us learned to play even a jew's-harp. For my own part, nevertheless, I was not allowed entirely to escape from art, for if music was forbidden to me, I devoted myself to literature. At the same time not to have studied music has always been one of my great regrets; because, rightly or wrongly, it has always appeared to me that music is the source of the purest happiness that life can bestow upon man. And in later life, when, after having realised how much of suffering and disillusion and bitterness are bound up in one's existence, the agonising question, "Why does this world exist?" has been forced upon my mind, I tell myself that its existence can have no other object than to produce, through the course of the thousands of stars that cross each other's path in space, sounds which together constitute a gigantic and divine symphony.

The thought is a childish one, certainly, but it reveals how deeply seated is my regret that I also should be unable to draw harmonious sounds from some kind of instrument!

Of all instruments, however, the one that charmed me most was the violoncello. The sound of the violoncello is for me the maximum of auditory pleasure, just as the scintillating gleam of the evening star is the maximum of visual pleasure; and it is perhaps for this reason that I cannot hear the violoncello without thinking of the sheen of the evening star, just as in the same way I can never look at the evening star without thinking of the sweet tones of the violoncello.

I love it to the point that, no matter how large an orchestra may be, I can deliberately ignore all the other instruments and listen to the violoncello alone. I often had the intention of buying one and learning to play it, but I

always had something else to do, and so time passed away—until I met Gusoi, nine years ago.

This Gusoi was a *tzigane*, a violoncellist—ugly, thick-headed and stupid, stupid to the last degree, the stupidest man I have ever met. His family surname must originally have been Guse.¹ Whether his parents deserved it or not, it would have fitted Gusoi as to the manner born!

Gusoi stammered to such an extent that it took him three times as long as anyone else to make himself understood, just as one had to repeat everything to him thrice before he could be made to comprehend; and when he laughed one looked into the depths of his throat, in spite of oneself, to see if he really suffered from goitre.

And then—yes, he played the violoncello; he even played it rather well. He played nonsense, silly and commonplace jingles. But the important thing was that he knew how to hold his 'cello in his arms and how to draw out its melodious tones. When I found that he could read music, I bought him several pieces—an "Ave Maria," "Traumerei," "Tre Giorni." . . . He learnt them, and he played them well.

Then I suffered a terrible fit of mortification. "Is it possible," I asked myself, "that this ugly and stupid *tzigane* knows how to play, and that I cannot? I sketch a little, I play a fair game of billiards, I am skilful and there is no reason why, if this wretched fellow has been able to learn, that I should not be able to do as much!"

On the following day, without wasting further time, I went to Bucharest to find a friend of mine, who was a violoncellist. I told him that I wanted to make some one a present of a 'cello, and that I wanted him to choose one for me. Nothing could have happened better; he knew where there was an excellent second-hand instrument to be had, the price of which was not too dear.

We went to a violin-maker's shop in a little side street, and my friend took the 'cello, tuned it and, after having run over a few scales and arpeggios, played to me an air that went direct to my heart. Good heavens, how beauti-

¹ The Rumanian for "goitre," a morbid enlargement of the thyroid gland, which renders most sufferers from it half-witted.

ful it sounded in that little low-ceilinged room! And what a brilliant star shone before my eyes as I listened. . . .

I gave the violin-maker his hundred and fifty francs, and he placed the 'cello in its case and wrapper. I bought some strings, some resin and a "Method for the Violoncello" by Piatti, and I confess that I went home that evening filled with greater delight than I had ever experienced when I left school for the holidays, or even when I was first made aware that I had secured my university degree.

I scarcely ate any dinner and then, although it was now very late, I took my 'cello, opened the "Method" and, in accordance with the instructions therein, I seated myself before the mirror in order to see that the bridge of the instrument was placed at the horizontal. And, without using the left hand, solely in order to learn how to handle the bow, I began to play, now on one string, now on another.

"Oh, don't! don't! *don't*, my dear," called out my wife from the adjoining room from time to time. "Leave it till tomorrow!"

But I kept on playing and it was only after her tenth supplication, and after I had glanced at the clock and noticed that it was two o'clock in the morning, that I consented to go to bed.

The next day I began to tackle the scales, and here my real difficulties began. Neither on that day nor on those that followed did I succeed, in spite of all my efforts, in extracting a bearable note. The strings buzzed and grated and snorted, but that was all.

Thinking that the instrument might have been damaged in some way on the way home, I sent for Gusoi. When he caught sight of the 'cello, he stood regarding it with open mouth. There was nothing in common between his pot-bellied and deformed fiddle and this beautiful instrument. He took it in his arms, caressed it, carefully inspected it, and then began to play an "Ave Maria."

It was wonderful to hear the strings vibrate under his hairy and dirty fingers. After having played through the whole repertoire that I had given to him, he placed his hand on his forehead with a look of intense admiration,

giving vent at the same time to a series of whistling exclamations. Finally, after repeatedly turning his eyes from the 'cello to myself and from myself to the 'cello, he begged me to sell it to him; for, he told me, whatever I might do, I should never learn to use it.

When, after having heard the wonderful tones that came from the instrument at his hands, I observed the tranquillity and the assurance with which he predicted that I would never be able to learn to play it, I was seized with such a fit of vexation that, God forgive me, I was at the point of throwing something at his head. . . .

I set to work, determined at any price to learn to play my 'cello. At the first free moment I had, I seized hold of the instrument. I made myself hated by the whole family. Whenever they saw me going towards the violoncello, their eyes assumed a horror-stricken expression.

As a matter of fact, they were justified, for I really made them suffer. I tried everything I could think of in vain. Vainly I placed myself before the mirror, in order to keep the position of the bow under observation; vainly I rubbed the strings until I wore out the resin; vainly I pressed on the strings with all my strength.

I moved the bridge higher, I shifted it lower; I changed the strings, I greased them with olive oil. All proved to be wasted trouble. Instead of notes I drew from the instrument various kinds of noises that fairly split one's head.

Thinking this might be due to the monotony of the scales, I tried some of the exercises, but that proved worse. Exercises which, when deciphered by my wife on the piano, proved extremely agreeable, became dreadful under my bow. They caterwauled lugubriously, like the dying groans of a strangling beast, or ominously, like the howling of a dog on the doorstep of a deserted house.

I drew back and looked at the violoncello, and I asked myself in desperation: "Is it possible that this instrument, which sounds so delightful in the hands of Gusoi, can howl and groan and mew so horribly in mine?" And my despair changed into exasperation every time I met Gusoi, who asked me with a suspicious smile and his eternal stutter: "Eh . . . eh . . . eh . . . and the . . . the . . . the 'cello?"

At last, after having tried everything, after having emigrated from one room to another, until eventually I was driven into the stable, in order not to be heard by the rest of the family; after realising that it was foolish to wish to learn to play the 'cello at forty, when the fingers have begun to thicken and to stiffen, I gave up the violoncello, to the greatest relief and for the tranquillity of the family.

And yet there was one being who tolerated—what am I saying?—who appreciated my playing. This was a tiny beast, scarcely as large as a grain of wheat. I never found whence it came. I deliberately searched for it on many occasions all over the house, but always without success. Whenever I played the 'cello, however, it was there, close to my instrument.

I had an idea at one time that it lived in the 'cello itself, and that, terror-stricken by my playing, it had a habit of running away and waiting till I had finished before returning to its abode. There was no ground, however, for this theory.

What I am now inclined to think is that this animal lived in a crack between two of the floor boards, and that the sound of my 'cello, far from driving it away, attracted it. It would come and run round the foot of the instrument sometimes, while at others it stood motionless, listening with close attention. Certain notes, I must admit, appeared to annoy the insect. My B-flat, notably, was a frightful howl, and made my tiny audience stand up every time in an attitude of unmistakable protestation.

Nevertheless of one thing there can be no shadow of a doubt: my music pleased it. It was a tiny and very sweet and good insect, dressed in a *café au lait* costume. Music softened her, as my mother had said. She allowed herself to be picked up, and would run up and down my fingers. Sometimes I looked at her under a glass. She had neither claws nor powerful mandibles; she could not be harmful. True, even if she had been dangerous, we should nevertheless have remained friends. Only think of it: she was the sole being that appreciated my musical talent.

Not knowing my little friend's name, I christened him

"Petit," and I used to call the whole family to see him:
"Here is Petit! Petit has come!"

One day I looked him up in an entomological dictionary, and I found him. He lives in timber, and has, unfortunate lad, three long Latin names which, even if printed in the smallest type, would fill a space seven times longer than his body. . . .

Ah, yes, there was at any rate one being in the world that liked my playing; but I could not, even so, compel my whole family to go through martyrdom in order to give pleasure to a beetle!

Two years ago, forgetting my rancour, I thought I would give the violoncello to Gusoi. Meeting one of his comrades, I told him to send him to see me.

"Oh, he died a year ago, poor fellow!"

Since then the 'cello has lain in the lumber room, among the rest of the old and disused things. . . . And now, with two broken strings, that hang disconsolately at one side, it lies in a corner, dusty and abandoned.

THE CHILD

By VSEVOLOD IVANOFF

MONGOLIA is a savage, joyless beast, where stones are a pest and water a venomous animal and even a butterfly will seek to bite. . . .

Of the heart of the Mongol no man knows aught. He is clad in skins and looks like a Chinaman, and breeds beyond the desert of Nord-Koi as far from the Russians as he may; he seeks even further solitudes China and India way, towards the misty blue of unknown tracts of country.

Yet here, near the Russians, there are Kirghizes, nomads from the Irtych who have fled before the wars till they have pitched their tents in these far-off Mongolian regions. They are well-known enough; their heart is no riddle . . . a heart of mica, a heart flush with their skin, the heart of ne'er-do-wells. They made their journey slowly, pushing in front of them cattle, children and sick. . . .

As for Russians, these have been hunted mercilessly even to these vast solitudes. Strong, healthy *moujiks*, they have left their invalids, their stragglers, to die of sickness or wounds and rot on the stony hills. Their families, their cattle, their goods, have fallen into the hands of the whites.

Stretched out in their tents, snappy as wolves, the *moujiks* are dreaming of their steppes and their Irtych homes. There are about fifty of them, led by Comrade Selivanoff. Their troop bears his name: "Red Army Band of Comrade Selivanoff."

Chiefly they weary.

So long as the pursuit had been over the great white hills, they had been awed by the towering rocks, but sight of the plain once more had made them homesick. This steppe was like that of Irtych, sand and hard grass and a sky of beaten iron. . . . But nothing was friendly, nothing theirs. No work. Everywhere just a savage wilderness.

And life is hard without women. . . .

They speak of women o' nights, coarsely, with ugly words, and, when they can hold out no longer, they get on their ponies and scour the steppe on the lookout for Kirghiz women. . . .

These, when they see a Russian, become as subservient as lambs. . . . They give no real pleasure; they lie like logs, eyes obstinately closed. Like animals.

As for their men, they fear the *moujiks* so much that they wander off into the plain. On sighting a Russian, they will stretch their bows or aim their rifles; but they never actually shoot. Perhaps they don't know how.

Athanasius Petrovitch Trubatcheff, paymaster of the band, was as tearful as a babe and had just such a smooth, pink face. But his long arched legs were like a camel's. To be impressive, he had to be mounted; on horseback, he lost his childish looks and became a man, greyish, irritable and awe inspiring.

On Trinity Sunday, three men, Selivanoff, Athanasius Petrovitch and Drevecinine, were picked out to go out into the steppe, prospecting for good grazing grounds.

The sand was steaming in the heat of the sun. Streams of hot wind flowed from the sky onto the earth, and from the earth there rose waves of hot air. All things alive, men and beasts, were heavy as stones.

Selivanoff spoke with a hoarse voice:

"What grazing grounds we had back there . . . the home grounds . . ."

He was speaking of Irtych. The men were silent for a while. The sun made their saddles as burning hot as the grass of the steppe and their eyes were as torn and red as if a fish hook had caught into them. At last Athanasius Petrovitch remarked plaintively:

"I wonder whether, over there, there is a drought like here . . ."

There were tears in his voice, but not in his eyes. It was his horse that had big drops of water trembling on the brink of his large eyes; the beast was blown and utterly exhausted.

In Indian file, following tracks made by wild sheep, the partisans were penetrating ever deeper into the steppe. . . .

Under the hoofs, the sand was crackling sadly. Sand was whirling in windy eddies, falling back on their heads and shoulders. The skin was so incrustated with sand that the sweat could find no outlet, and was boiling and scalding within. . . .

Towards evening, as they were filing out of a glen, Selivanoff pointed westwards:

"A carriage!"

Far off in the direction he had indicated, one could see faint clouds of sand.

"Probably just Kirghizes."

Whereupon a discussion started. Drevecinine maintained the Kirghizes were much farther off, and would certainly not come tickle the legs of Comrade Selivanoff. Athanasius Petrovitch put his money on the Kirghizes, because of the thickness of the clouds now.

But when these clouds had drawn nearer, they decided unanimously that these must be strangers.

At the sound of their masters' voices, the horses guessed there was something in the wind; they raised their ears, and, before the order had been given them, were lying crouched in the sand. Their grey and brown bodies, prostrate on the ground, seemed to take on grotesque, pitiful shapes, and their legs were like spindles. They breathed heavily, jerkily, and, it may be from very shame, shut their big, frightened eyes.

Selivanoff and Athanasius Petrovitch lay down at the edge of the ravine. The paymaster, as was his wont, was whining in nasal tones. Selivanoff always placed him at his side, in order to avoid feeling the sting of fear himself; his groanings made him glad and inspired his heavy *moujik's* heart with a proud sensation of bravery.

The dust cloud was getting ever nearer. One could hear the noise of wheels and could discern the black manes of the horses.

Selivanoff declared firmly:

"They are Russians."

He called up Drevecinine.

There were two travelers, both with red-edged military caps, in a new carriage of twined reeds. One could not see

their faces through the dust; the only thing one saw was the red of the caps, a raised rifle and, from time to time, a hand lifting a whip.

After a moment's reflection, Drevecinine said:

"Officers . . . officers on a mission . . . perhaps inspectors."

Selivanoff winked with his eyes and his mouth.

"They will have a fine reception . . ."

The carriage was bringing these men, irrevocably, ever nearer. It seemed to be shoving forward the horses in front, and, behind, sweeping the tracks of its own wheels with a broom of dust.

Athanasius Petrovitch protested whiningly:

"Better not . . . better just capture them."

"And your head, you don't set any value on it?"

Selivanoff, having snapped this out suddenly, put his finger to the trigger, with the same gesture with which he would have prepared to unfasten a button:

"No use having pity on people here . . ."

What exasperated them was the boldness of these officers appearing in the far-off steppe, without escort, as if numbers were not of import in coming to beard the *moujik* in his fastness.

One of the officers, standing straight upright, was scanning the plain, but he could not see much for the dust and the wind that was flaying the dry grass in the red glare of the evening.

At the entrance to the glen, two rocks strangely like the necks of horses . . . in purple dust, a carriage, wheels, men busy with their thoughts. . . .

Rifle shots . . . a salvo. . . .

The two red-edged caps vanished together. . . .

The tense reins slackened suddenly. . . .

The horses shied and made to run amuck. But, with a sudden tremor, they stopped dead, lowering their nostrils mossy with white froth.

"Dead all right," announced Athanasius, on approaching with his companions.

And truly the two travelers with the red caps were dead, sitting shoulder to shoulder, heads thrown back. But one of them is a woman. Her black hair is undone and covered

partly with yellow dust. Her breast swells under a soldier's blouse.

"That's funny!" said Drevecinine. "That comes of putting on a cap. It's her fault. One does not kill women . . . one uses them . . ."

Athanasius Petrovitch spat contemptuously:

"You're naught but a monster, a *bourgeois* . . . nothing touches you."

"Wait a minute!" ordered Selivanoff. "We are no brigands. Come, we must make an inventory of the property of the People. Give me some paper . . ."

Among other "property of the People" in the carriage, there was a Chinese basket. In the basket, a child, with light eyes and fair hair, holding a corner of its rug tightly in its tiny hand. A pretty baby, feebly crying. . . .

Athanasius Petrovitch was moved:

"There . . . he too . . . he says the best way he can, that . . ."

Once more, the *moujiks* deplored having killed the woman. They did not take off her clothes. Only the man was buried stark naked in the sand.

Athanasius went back in the carriage, nursing the baby in his arms and singing to it:

Nightingale, nightingale, little bird,

Canary, canary, sadly singing. . . .

He saw his native village, the cattle browsing, his own folk, the children frolicking, and he was crying softly. The baby cried too.

The hoofs of the little Mongolian horses with steel muscles sent the sand flying in whirls. Their faces burnt up as the sand, their souls hard as their horses' hoofs, the *moujiks* were galloping along the tracks, through the low shrubs squashed flat by the sun against the soil, stunted, shriveled up.

Tracks of wild sheep, bitter, merciless sands. . . . Mongolia is indeed a savage, joyless beast!

Back at the camp, the officer's kit was examined: books, a satchel containing tobacco, some instruments of shining brass among which was a square box with divisions in it, mounted on a long tripod.

The assembled partisans looked on, felt, groped, tested, weighed. They smelled of sheep's fat. Being ever bored, they were ever eating, and their clothes were one mass of spots. Some, with salient cheek bones and fine mild lips, came from the Don. Others, with black hair and tanned faces, came from the lime quarries of Irtych. All of them had the bandy legs and hoarse voices peculiar to the children of the steppe.

Athanasius Petrovitch lifted up the instrument with the tripod and announced:

"It is a telescope."

Then, with narrowed eyes, he added:

"Quite a good telescope, that is worth millions. That's the thing they saw the moon with. Seems they found gold mines there; gold so pure that it could be made into meal . . . only required putting into sacks."

One of the partisans, a young fellow, who had been in the cities, snorted:

"What's that you're singing?"

Athanasius was quick to show ill temper.

"I? Oh, I'm . . . just rubbish. Wait a moment and I'll show you, you dirty boulder!"

They split up the tobacco between them and gave the instruments to Athanasius, who, as treasurer, might barter them with the Kirghizes for something useful. He put them before the kid.

"Come, play with them!"

But the child paid no attention; it was crying out loudly. Athanasius tried one thing after another till sweat was running down his face, but all in vain. The child would not stop.

The cookboys brought the food. There was a strong smell of fat and *cacha* and cabbage. They all took their wooden spoons out of their boots and sat on the trodden grass. The valley was fairly deep and shady; on the height above, a mounted sentry was on the lookout. One could hear him shouting: "Come, get a move on. I want to eat. Where's the relief?"

Having dined, they bethought themselves that the kid must eat also, since he continued to yell uninterruptedly.

Athanasius Petrovitch masticated some bread and stuffed the moist paste into the child's open mouth like into a young bird's beak.

"Come . . . eat . . . little one . . . eat."

But the little one would not eat. It shut its mouth firmly and obstinately turned its head away. It did not want the stuff, and started crying anew.

The *moujiks* were assembled round it, contemplating it in silence, one above the other's shoulders.

The heat was still overwhelming. Mutton fat shone on lips and cheeks, shirts were unbuttoned wide and the bare feet were yellow like the soil of Mongolia.

One of the men suggested:

"Give it some cabbage."

Athanasius Petrovitch pushed into the child's mouth his finger bespeared with *tchi*. The good *tchi* slobbered down onto the tiny pink shirt and the coverlet.

The kid did not want that either.

"A doggy is not so stupid as that . . . it licks your finger."

"Aye, but that's because it's a dog. This is a child."

"Yet . . ."

They had no cow's milk in the contingent. They thought of mare's milk, of which they had some. But they decided it was impracticable, for *koumis* makes one drunk and the child would certainly be sick after it.

Then, quite at sea, they divided up into little groups, discussing the problem. Among them Athanasius Petrovitch wandered, his *bechmet* all awry, his narrow eyes full of anxiety. With his shrill, piercing, childish voice, he was whining as if he himself were the hungry bairn.

"What are we to do . . . ? Since he won't eat . . . we must . . ."

Big men as they were, overflowing with strength, they exchanged weakly, indecisive looks.

"It's a matter for women."

"Sure!"

"With a woman there, he might eat mutton."

"That's it."

Selivanoff called them all together and made a speech.

"We cannot let this child of Christians die like a wild beast. His father was a *bourgeois*, but a kid's a kid."

They were all agreed on that.

"No, the kid can't help it."

Drevecinine laughed.

"Let him be. He'll grow among us. In time, he may catch the moon!"

The *moujiks* did not echo this sentiment. Athanasius Petrovitch lifted his fists at him and shouted:

"Conscienceless dog that thou art!"

For a moment he marked time, swinging his arms about. Then, suddenly, he exclaimed:

"It's a cow! It's a cow we want!"

Whereupon they all cried with one voice:

"Without a cow he'll die."

"We must at all costs get a cow."

"He'll decline without a cow."

Athanasius said in resolute tones:

"Boys, I'm going to fetch a cow."

Drevecinine interrupted him scoffingly:

"At Irtych, I suppose, in Lebiage's meadows?"

"You filthy joker! No need to go so far . . . the Kirghizes have cows!"

"I suppose they'll barter you one for your telescope?"

Athanasius Petrovitch threw himself at him furiously and shouted in his very face:

"You vermin! You tormentor of the human species! You scamp! Do you want me to smash your jaw?"

They exchanged volleys of oaths, but Selivanoff, as chairman of the meeting, pacified them.

"Enough! Let us vote on it."

They voted and decided as follows:

Drevecinine, Athanasius and three others were to go into the steppe as far as the Kirghiz encampment and bring back a cow. If they were lucky, they would bring back two cows, or even more, for the cookboys reported an imminent dearth of meat. They fastened their carbines to their saddles and put on their foxskins, so as to look more like Kirghizes from a distance.

"God be with you!"

They wrapped the child in its cover and placed it well in the shade under a tree. Beside him a young *moujik* mounted guard. To amuse himself as much as to interest the kid, he kept firing his revolver into the bushes.

Sad sands of Mongolia, sad stones that seem like evil arms stretched out of the depths of the earth.

It is night. Warm air is still rising from the soil. The dogs of the Kirghiz encampment are barking at the wolves and the darkness. The Kirghizes are there, having escaped from death.

Their cattle . . . will they escape too?

Green, thick, stifling darkness is lying heavily on the sands, as if, just before dawn, earth had trouble in keeping them back. A strong smell of *koumis* and dried mud rises from the tents. Before the fires, Kirghiz children are sitting, wasted away by hunger. Beside them are the dogs, with narrow noses and ribbed flanks. Behind tents that look like haystacks is a lake, with a fringe of reeds.

Hidden in the reeds, the Russians opened fire into the yellow fires.

The Kirghizes leaped out of the tents, terror stricken, and kept up all together a shout of:

"Kill . . . kill . . . the Russians!" and jumped on their ponies. Piercing shrieks filled the tents and the steppes. An old Kirghiz tumbled off his mount and fell head foremost into a huge pot full of boiling milk he turned over. All scalded, he started moaning. A mangy dog stuck his starving mouth into the hot liquid.

The mares were neighing and the sheep knocking each other over as if wolves were near. Panting cows breathed heavily.

The Kirghiz women, at the sight of the Russians, lay down submissively as usual.

Drevecinine filled his flask hurriedly with milk, and, with blows of his *nagaika*, assembled some calves and a cow near one of the tents. The calves, feeling free of their fetters, stretched out their soft, moist heads towards the big swollen udders.

"What an appetite they have, the young oxen!"

And Drevecinine contentedly led away his cow.

They were just setting off when Athanasius Petrovitch remembered something.

"Oh, we must get a sucking bottle . . . the Devil! Fancy forgetting that!"

He went quickly back and rummaged round for one. The fires in the tents were out. He got hold of a burning log and beat the sparks out of it, coughing with the acrid smoke of it, and went on with his search.

He was holding the brand in one hand and his gun in the other. But he could find no sucking bottle. The women were still lying flat on their felt rugs, covering their faces with their sleeves. The children were howling. Athanasius Petrovitch, seized with anger, shouted to a young Kirghiz girl in a tent:

"Get a sucking bottle, you damned vermin . . . quick!"

The girl broke out into sobs, muttering:

"*Ni kerek . . . ni kerek . . . all . . . all . . .*"

Beside her, on a skin, lay a baby, swathed in rags, crying. The woman swayed hither and thither, repeating:

"*Ni kerek . . . ni kerek . . . all . . . all . . .*"

Athanasius Petrovitch caught one of her breasts and pinched it. In a trice he had recovered his good humour and exclaimed:

"Why, here's the sucking bottle we need. . . . Just the thing!"

The girl still muttered:

"*Ni kerek . . . ni kerek . . .*"

"Enough of your *kerek*. . . . Dry up! . . . Come along . . .!"

And he took her away, grabbing her arm.

He had let the brand go and the tent was once more in darkness. He groped for his horse and placed the woman across the saddle.

From time to time on the ride back, he would feel her breasts. Thus he brought her into Selivanoff's camp.

"I've found the very thing!" he shouted merrily. "Had to find it, you know!"

In the darkness, Athanasius Petrovitch had noticed nothing, but on arriving at the camp, he found the woman had taken her child with her.

"That doesn't matter," said the *moujiks*. "There is enough milk for two. We have a cow, and the woman is a healthy woman."

The Kirghiz girl was silent and solemn. Never did any one see her giving the children the breast. She carried them both on her back, after the fashion of her race, one white baby and one yellow.

After a week, at the general meeting, Athanasius Petrovitch made a statement:

"There is crooked work going on, comrades. This Kirghiz lass gives her own kid the first milk. It sucks it all in and there is nothing left for our kid . . . I have watched properly."

The *moujiks* went to have a look for themselves. The two babies were just like all other babies, one white skinned, the other the colour of a ripe lemon. But the Russian seemed thinner than the Kirghiz.

Athanasius Petrovitch exclaimed with much gesticulation:

"I gave the kid a name . . . he is called Vaska . . . and look at what she has done with it . . ."

Drevecinine addressed the baby:

"Vaska, you must not let her take advantage of you!"

They took a stick and tied it to a log so both ends were equal. To each end they tied one of the children in his felt sack by means of strings of pleated horsehair. They wanted to see which of them weighed the heavier.

The poor babies were crying, apparently objecting to being hung thus. The woman, standing by a tree, was crying too. The *moujiks* were perfectly silent.

"Let go!" commanded Selivanoff at last.

Athanasius let go the stick and the little Russian shot up on high.

"You yellow-jawed scamp, you!" exclaimed Athanasius Petrovitch. He picked up a sheepshead that was lying near and placed it on the Russian baby's head. The children were now of equal weight.

The *moujiks* started becoming noisy now, and in their turn exclaimed:

"A whole head more! She has fed hers a whole head more than ours!"

"We did not watch well enough!"

"The savage beast that she is!"

"Well, we had too much to do to watch her the whole time."

The *moujiks* recognised the force of this argument.

"How can we watch her?"

"After all she is his mother."

Athanasius Petrovitch stamped his foot and yelled:

"So according to your idea, we've got to let a Russian perish for the sake of that damned kid? . . . let Vaska perish, eh?"

The *moujiks* were looking at Vaska lying stretched out, very thin and very pale. They were greatly embarrassed.

At last, Selivanoff said to Athanasius Petrovitch:

"Nothing else for it . . . that one . . . God be with him . . . he must die, the Kirghiz. Ah, well, he won't be the first one . . ."

The *moujiks* took another look at Vaska, then dispersed silently. Athanasius Petrovitch took the little Kirghiz in his felt sack. The mother started howling. He dazed her with a light blow of his fist and went out of the camp.

Two days later, the *moujiks* were standing on tiptoes at the entrance to the tent, looking over each other's shoulders, at the Kirghiz woman sitting inside, giving the breast to the white child.

She still bore her submissive look, and her eyes were narrow like grains of oats. She had her *caftan* of violet felt on, and her red leather boots.

The kid, face nestled in her breast, was beating with its tiny hand against the *caftan* and wagging its feet inordinately.

The *moujiks* looked on, proud and laughing.

Athanasius Petrovitch, who had been fondly watching the child, sniffed and remarked in his nasal, tearful voice:

"Eh, seems to agree with him . . ."

And behind the tent, the steppes of this strange land of Mongolia were running on ever, no man knows whither, the vastnesses of this savage and joyless beast. . . .

CAPTAIN RYBNIKOFF

By ALEXANDRE KUPRINE

ON the very day of the overwhelming Russian naval disaster of Tsushima, as dim rumours were first reaching Europe of that bloody Japanese victory, Captain Rybnikoff, who lived in Petrograd, in a nameless kennel of the Peski quarter, received from Irkutsk a telegram in the following terms:

"Send lists immediately take care patient settle account."

Captain Rybnikoff immediately informed his landlady that urgent business compelled him to leave Petrograd for a day or two, and that she was not to take alarm at his absence. Then he dressed and went out of the house, never to enter it again.

Five days later, the landlady was summoned to the police office to give information concerning her vanished lodger.

The good woman, who was in the forties, of comfortable girth, and the widow of a Consistory official, truthfully related all she knew: her lodger was a quiet, poor man, somewhat naïve, polite, neither drank nor smoked, seldom went out and did not receive any visits.

She was unable to say more, for all the fear inspired in her by the captain of Gendarmerie whose long, thick moustachios shook ferociously and who was prodigal of strong words.

During these five days, Captain Rybnikoff scoured Petrograd in every direction. Everywhere, in the streets, in the restaurants, the theatres, the tramways, the railway stations, one encountered this little lame officer, with tanned complexion, untidy, strangely talkative, a perfect type of the bureaucratic rat, the administrative officer of the army service or medical branches.

Several times he was observed at General Headquarters, in the ambulance units, the police offices, the base office, the garrison administration and a dozen other such places.

He exasperated the employees with his complaints, his absurd demands, his humble petitions, his "old soldier" rudeness and his noisy jingoism.

Everybody soon knew his story off by heart: how he had been wounded in the head at the battle of Liao-Yang, and in the foot during the retreat of Mukden.

"The Devil take me," he would say. "Why have I received no bounty money to this day? Why have they not given me my living allowance or my travel money? And my pay for the last two months?"

He was ready, he exclaimed, to shed the last drop of his blood for the Tzar, the Throne and the Country; he would go back to the Far East as soon as his wound in the foot should have closed, but this devil of a foot would not heal, it went on suppurating. Did man ever have to bear the like of that? Why . . . look for yourselves! Then he would put the sick foot on a chair and start rolling up his trousers. But he was always stopped, out of a feeling of half sympathetic, half disgusted prudery.

His behaviour, impertinent yet nervous and anxious, his strange mixture of timidity and cheek, his stupidity, his annoying idle inquisitiveness, exasperated all the officials.

Vainly did they explain to him, with every possible kindness, that he was not complaining in the right quarter, vainly did they tell him the proper office to go to, the papers to be filled in, or that they would let him know the result of the enquiries they would make—all was useless; the man seemed determined to understand nothing. Indeed he was so timid, so innocent, so naïve, that one could not get really angry with him. If you were sharp with him, he would smile, the smile of an idiot that bared his gums, and then rub his hands together with a disturbed air, or suddenly beg in a hoarse, ingratiating voice:

"Could you please not give me a cigarette? I have not got the wherewithal to buy any and I am dying for a smoke. . . . They say poverty is not a crime, but it is at least a confoundedly filthy state to get into."

Thus did he disarm the most disagreeable and rude of officials. They would give him a cigarette and let him sit on the edge of a table. Unthinkingly, in a half patronising

tone, they would reply to his queries concerning the progress of the campaign. There was something touching, moving, in this nervous thirst of the poor invalid, mere beggar now, to be told all about the war, the tide of which had cast him ashore like flotsam. Out of compassion, they wanted to soothe him, to comfort him, to enlighten him; so they were much more open with him than with others.

His interest in the Russo-Japanese War was indeed very acute. While administrative enquiries of a lengthy nature were being made for him, he would wander about from room to room, from desk to desk. Whenever he heard a word about military events, he would draw near and listen, with a naïve, silly smile on his lips, that seemed habitual.

When at last he departed, he left behind him a feeling of relief, together with a kind of dim, anxious pity. Elegant staff officers said of him with aristocratic bitterness:

"To think that that is a Russian officer! Look at the type he is! Is it not easy to understand how we have been beaten again and again? Sheer stupidity, cretinism, utter lack of all sense of personal dignity. . . . Poor Russia!"

During these busy days, Captain Rybnikoff engaged a room in a shabby hotel near a railway station. Although he had his papers as a reserve officer on him, he elected to say that they were at the base office. He deposited in this hotel his household goods, consisting of a bundle of wraps with a plaid and a cushion, a travel outfit and a portman-teau with his body linen and one civilian suit.

The hotel servants declared he came home late, somewhat under the influence of liquor, but that he gave regularly ten *kopeks* as a tip to the night porter for opening the door to him. He only slept three or four hours, sometimes not even taking off his clothes. He got up early and could be heard for hours walking up and down his room. Towards midday he would set out.

From time to time, and from various telegraph offices, the captain would wire to Irkutsk his deep solicitude on behalf of some dangerously wounded hospital case that must have been very dear to him. One day it happened that this excitable, curious, incoherent little man met Vladimir Ivano-

vitch Stchavinsky, a journalist on the staff of a big Petrograd daily.

II

Before going to the races, Stchavinsky had dropped into an obscure little restaurant, "The Fame of Petrograd," where reporters were wont to assemble about two o'clock in the afternoon to exchange news items and tittle-tattle. Up to a certain point, Stchavinsky was an aristocrat among journalists, and he did not belong to this starving, jovial, cynical band of men, who knew everything and spared nobody. His Sunday articles, brilliant, facetious but somewhat superficial, were much appreciated by the public. He earned good money, dressed with great care and had extensive and influential relations. But, in "The Fame of Petrograd," he was always made welcome for his outspoken, sardonic talk, and for the pleasing readiness with which he lent small sums of money to his colleagues. That day, the reporters had promised to bring him the programme of the races, with certain mysterious annotations of stable origin.

With an affable, respectful smile, the porter, Vassili, took Stchavinsky's overcoat.

"All the gentlemen are there, Vladimir Ivanovitch. In the big room, Prokhor's room."

Big, fat Prokhor, with his short, cropped head and ginger moustache, smiled familiarly, caressingly, as he looked at this respectable customer as at all others, not in the eyes, but above the forehead.

"It is a long time surely, Vladimir Ivanovitch, since we had the honour of seeing you. This way, please. All your friends are in there."

Seated round the accustomed long table, his colleagues were dipping their pens hurriedly in the one and only inkpot and blackening great sheets of writing paper. Whilst working, they succeeded in swallowing down fishballs, grilled sausages with mashed potatoes, vodka and beer, likewise in smoking and retailing the latest gossip from the city and the editorial offices. One of the habitués lay sleeping on the sofa like a log, with a handkerchief on a cushion to serve as a pillow. The atmosphere was split by the smoke into thick, blue layers.

Stchavinsky shook hands with the reporters and noticed among them a uniformed captain, sitting with his legs sprawled out, his hands and chin supported by a huge sword. Journalists never wonder at anything, so the presence of this officer in no way surprised Stchavinsky. Many a time he had seen weird people drop into this noisy, adventurous circle: tramps and jewelers, musicians and dancing masters, archdeacons and actors, managers of traveling wild beast shows. Gypsies, fish merchants, gamblers, music hall managers and countless others belonging to the most unexpected professions. When Stchavinsky got to the officer, the latter rose, squared his shoulders and introduced himself in a hoarse voice, a real drunken old soldier's voice:

"Hm! . . . Junior Captain Rybnikoff. Charmed to meet you. You also a writer? I have the greatest respect for the writing profession. The Press is the seventh Great Power, is it not?"

Whilst speaking, he was smiling, clicking his heels, nearly dislocating Stchavinsky's hand, and bowing funnily, jerkily throwing up his back.

"Where on earth have I seen the man before?" Stchavinsky said to himself anxiously. "He reminds me astonishingly of somebody . . . but of whom?"

There were in the room all the celebrities of Petrograd reporting staffs: first of all the "Three Musketeers," Kodlubtcheff, Riajkin and Popoff. They were always to be seen together. Their family names, pronounced one after the other, made up an iambic line. Which did not prevent them quarreling incessantly and inventing at each other's expense the most outrageous yarns of exactions, falsifications, libels and blackmail. Sergius Kondrakoff, who for his amazing sensuality was called "The Pathological Case," was also there and another individual, whose name, like the likeness on a bad coin, has been obliterated by time, but whom all Petrograd knew as Matania. Of the sullen Svistcheff, the police court news expert, it was pleasantly said: "He is a cute blackmailer . . . never squeezes out less than three rubles." The sleeper on the sofa, Pestrukin, was a long-haired poet, who fed his fragile, drunken body with the proceeds of lyrical verse celebrating popular

festivals and imperial birthdays. There were other equally famous men there, whose province was fires, crimes, the morgue, and dogs run over in the street.

Matania, a tall, freckled, rough-haired fellow, remarked:

"You'll get the programme in a minute, Vladimir Ivanovitch. Meanwhile let me call your attention to our noble Captain. He has just come back from the Far East, where he has pulverised the perfidious, yellow-skinned and almond-eyed foe. Come, General, carry on!"

The officer coughed and spit on the floor.

"What a bounder!" thought Stchavinsky with a frown.

"Ah, my friends," exclaimed Rybnikoff raspingly, while waving his sword, "believe me, the Russian soldier is no small beer. Immortal Souvoroff called him a marvelous paladin. It's true, is it not? In one word . . . but, I tell you frankly, our leaders at the front are not worth a damn. You know the popular saying: 'such the priest, such the parish?' True, is it not? They steal and play cards and entertain their mistresses . . . and we all know woman can do that which the Devil himself would fail in."

Matania observed: "I say, General . . . you were speaking about map-making?"

"Ah, yes, thanks, map-making, to be sure. My head . . . drunk a bit too freely today, I fear." Rybnikoff directed on Stchavinsky a quick, searching look. "Well, here you are. A staff colonel was designated for patrol reconnaissance duty. He took a *sotnia* of Cossacks with him, good soldiers . . . may the Devil have care of them! . . . True, isn't it? He also took an interpreter and set off. He arrived at a village. What is the village called? The interpreter is silent. Come on, boys! Make them speak . . . and the whips, the *nagaikas* came into action.

"The interpreter said, '*Boutoundu*,' which, being translated from the Chinese, means 'I don't understand.' Ah, ah! Got him to speak out, the son of a she-wolf! And the colonel writes down on his sketch 'Village of Boutoundu.' The troop rides on, comes to another village. Name? Boutoundu. What? Again Boutoundu? Boutoundu. The colonel meekly writes down Boutoundu again. He wrote it down for about ten villages. What's that Tchekoff said: 'You may

be called Ivanoff VII, but you are a fool nevertheless?"

"So you have read Tchekoff?" immediately commented Stchavinsky.

"Who? Tchekoff? Antocha? What the devil. . . . Why! . . . We are friends . . . we've drunk many a bottle together. He just said, 'You may be the seventh, but you are a fool nevertheless.'"

"It is in the Far East you met Tchekoff?"

"Why, of course. Yes, in the Far East. He was often with Antoine Petrovitch. It often happened to us that . . . you may be the seventh . . ."

While Rybnikoff was speaking, Stchavinsky was observing him closely. Everything recalled the line officer: voice, mannerisms, threadbare uniform, poor, rough speech. Stchavinsky had met hundreds of just such drunken captains. They too smiled and swore and twisted their moustaches, and shrugged their shoulders, and took up picturesque attitudes, leaning on their swords, and made imaginary spurs ring. But in Rybnikoff there was something mysterious, a nervous force, a tension, that baffled the journalist. He would not have been in the least surprised if this old bibulous fool were to start suddenly talking in refined, cultured, witty fashion, or, on the contrary, were to commit some impulsive, mad, violent, aye, even bloody action.

What struck him most forcibly was the difference between the impression conveyed by the captain's profile and his full face. From the side it was a good average Russian face, with a dash of the Kalmuk: a small, bulging out forehead under a receding cranium, an indifferent nose, the hairs of moustache and whiskers black, sparse and stiff, a close-cropped head with greyish hair, a yellowish complexion, darkened by exposure. . . . But, when the man turned his full face to Stchavinsky, the latter seemed at once to recollect something vaguely familiar about it. He had seen somewhere these light-brown eyes, narrow, piercing, somewhat oblique under the curious black eyebrows that led from the root of the nose to far up the brow, that dry, vigorous skin stretched out on the prominent cheek bones, and, above all, that general impression of a mocking face, proud in its way, but in an animal rather

than a human way. In short, the face of an inhabitant of some other world.

"I must have seen him in a dream . . ." concluded Stchavinsky, while, absorbed in his examination, he unconsciously half closed his eyes and cocked his head to one side. Rybnikoff at once turned round, with a sonorous, nervous laugh:

"What interests you in my face, Monsieur the writer? Am I then so odd?" He raised his voice and hit his chest with comical pride. "I am Captain Rybnikoff . . . R-y-b-n-i-k-o-f-f. . . . The Russian soldier beats his enemies without counting them . . . eh? True, is it not?"

While making his pen run on the paper, and without looking at Rybnikoff, Koldubscheff snapped out:

"And surrenders also without counting . . ."

Rybnikoff threw a quick look at Koldubscheff. For a fraction of a second, the time a stroke of lightning takes to flash, a strange, greenish-yellow flame passed through his brown eyes. It did not escape Stchavinsky. But, immediately thereafter, the captain burst out laughing, spread out his arms and slapped his thigh noisily:

"One cannot help it. It is the will of God. The proverb is quite right. A good cat gets a good rat. Eh? True, is it not?"

He suddenly addressed Stchavinsky, giving him a nudge with his knee, and emitting a despairing sigh:

"We let all go as it pleases, well or ill. We do not seem to be able to hang on to our positions. The shells they send us are the wrong size. The men remain four days without food. Whereas the Japs, whom the Devil curse, work like machines. They may be monkeys, but they have civilisation with them. Eh? True, is it not?"

"So, according to you, they are going to win?" enquired Stchavinsky.

Rybnikoff's lips folded curiously. It was a trick of his Stchavinsky had already noticed. During the whole conversation, especially when the captain had put some question and was listening intently for a reply, or else when staring nervously at some one, his lips contracted in this strange way, a sort of convulsive, evil smile.

"God alone knows," he answered. "Without God's aid one can do nothing. Eh? True, is it not? The campaign is not over yet. We have time on our side. The Russian soldier is used to victory. Remember Poltava, the immortal Suvoroff, Sebastopol and the way in which, in 1812, we repulsed the greatest captain of all, Napoleon. The god of Russia is a mighty god. Eh? True, is it not?"

While he was speaking, the odd, malicious, inhuman little smile was still playing round the corners of his lips, and a sinister, yellowish glare flashed in his eyes under the black, stern eyebrows. Just then, they brought coffee to Stchavinsky.

"A small glass of cognac?" he suggested to the captain.

"No, thanks," replied Rybnikoff with another nudge on the knee of the journalist. "The Devil only knows what I have not drunk today already. My inside will burst. Ever since early morning I have been wandering through the vineyards of the Lord. Drinking is the national joy of the Russian. Eh? True, is it not?" he shouted out in a voice suddenly grown brutal and bibulous.

"He is playing a game," said Stchavinsky to himself, but nevertheless continued offering drinks to the captain.

"Beer, then, perhaps? Or wine?"

"No, thanks. I have had my fill."

"Some mineral water?"

The captain brightened up.

"Yes, that's it. I will not say no to a little mineral water."

A syphon was brought. With great eager gulps, Rybnikoff emptied a glass; his hands were shaking with impatience. He poured out a second glass immediately. One could see he had for a long time been tormented by thirst.

"Yes, undoubtedly playing a game . . ." thought Stchavinsky. "Rum sort of chap! He is disturbed, tired out, but not the least bit drunk."

"The Devil take this heat!" said Rybnikoff in his husky voice.

"But, gentlemen, I seem to be hindering you in your work . . ."

"Not at all, we are used to it," hummed Riajkin.

"Well, have you no fresh news from the seat of war?" asked Rybnikoff, suddenly brandishing his sword. "Ah, gentlemen, what interesting details I could give you! If you like, I will dictate them to you, and you will only require to write them down. You will give the thing as a title: 'Memoirs of Junior Captain Rybnikoff, Back from the War.' And please don't think I am a glutton for money. You shall have it all free and gratis."

"Why not?" said Matania, though without great enthusiasm. "No reason why we shouldn't print a few sticks of interview with you. . . . Talking of the war, Vladimir Ivanovitch, you have heard nothing more about the fleet?"

"No. Is there anything new?"

"They say . . . but it is quite impossible. Kondracheff knows it from one of his friends, who is on the admiralty staff. I say, Pathological Case, tell Stchavinsky about it!"

The Pathological Case, an individual with a tragical beard and a face of putty, spoke through his nose:

"I give you the news for what it is worth, Vladimir Ivanovitch. It is at any rate from a good source. The rumour goes about at the admiralty that a big part of the fleet surrendered without firing a shot, that the sailors mutinied, tied up the officers and ran up the white flag. They talk of about twenty ships."

"Terrible . . ." said Stchavinsky in a low tone, "but perhaps it is not true. Besides, we live in a time when the unlikely becomes possible. You know what is happening in the naval harbours? The men are being stirred by a secret propaganda, and the naval officers are afraid to meet the men from their ships on land."

The conversation became general. This cynical company of intriguers was in its way a receptor, sensitive to all the gossip of the city. News frequently reached them before it got to the Cabinet. Each one brought in his bit. All this was so interesting that the Three Musketeers themselves, whom most things left cold, joined in with unusual vigour.

"It is said the troops behind the front refuse to advance and that the men are shooting their officers with their own revolvers."

"I have been told the Commander-in-Chief has had fifty nurses strung up. They were, of course, only nurses so far as uniform went."

Stchavinsky was looking at Rybnikoff. The captain, as a rule so talkative, was now silent. His eyes narrowed, leaning his breast against the handle of his sword, he was listening attentively to each of the speakers in turn. Under the drawn skin of his cheek bones, one could see the muscles moving rapidly, while his lips appeared as if he were repeating mentally every word to himself.

"Who is it he reminds me of?" the journalist asked himself for the tenth time. This question obsessed him to such a degree that he had recourse to a trick he had often tried with success. He made himself forget the captain's existence and then suddenly looked at him intently. Usually this enabled him to recall the family name or the place where he had met the person, but on this occasion the result was absolutely negative.

Under Stchavinsky's persistent look, Rybnikoff turned round and again sighed, with a desolate air, shaking his head:

"It is indeed awful news. You believe it? Eh? But even if it were true, there would still be hope. You know the Russian saying: 'God will not abandon us and pigs will not eat us up.' The pigs in this case are, of course, the Japanese."

He was now bearing up well under Stchavinsky's searching glance, and the journalist could see in his eyes the light of an implacable, inhuman hatred.

At that moment, the poet Pestrukin, who had been slumbering on the sofa, directed his filmy eyes at the officer:

"So, you face of a Jap, you're still there, are you?" said he in a drunken voice, almost without opening his lips. Then he rolled onto his other side on the sofa.

"A Jap! That is what he is like!" Stchavinsky said to himself with anxious curiosity. And, slowly, weighing his words, he articulated:

"You are a queer fellow, Captain."

"I?" shouted he, his nervous lips folding again as be-

fore. "I am Junior Captain Rybnikoff," whereat he again smote his breast with grotesque pride. "My Russian heart is suffering. Allow me to shake you by the hand. I got my head bruised at Lioa-Yang, and was wounded in the foot at Mukden. Eh? You don't believe me? I am going to let you see . . ."

He set his foot up on the table and started rolling up his trouser leg.

Stchavinsky frowned: "Let that be, captain. We believe you."

Yet, with the professional curiosity of the journalist, he had time to throw a rapid glance at Rybnikoff's leg, and he noticed that this beggar was wearing superfine silk underclothes.

Just then a letter for Matania was brought in.

"There you are, Vladimir Ivanovitch," said Matania after tearing the envelope open. "It is the programme sent on from the stable. Put something on for me on Zenith, win and place. I will refund you Tuesday."

"Will you come to the races with me, Captain?"

"To the races? Certainly. With pleasure." He rose noisily, upsetting the table in the process. "Captain Rybnikoff is aye ready to go anywhere you please: to barracks, to the fight, to the Devil. Ah, ha, ha! That's the sort of man he is. Eh? True, is it not?"

In the carriage, Stchavinsky linked his arm in the captain's, leant towards him and muttered in his ear:

"Don't be afraid. I won't give you away. But your name is as much Rybnikoff as mine is Vanderbilt. You are an officer on the Japanese Imperial General Staff. Your rank is at least that of a colonel, and for the time being, you are a secret agent in Russia."

But the noise of the wheels must have prevented Rybnikoff from hearing these words, or perhaps, if he heard them, he did not understand them. Swaying left and right, he said in his husky voice, with the sudden enthusiasm of inebriation:

"So, we are to go on the bash together, you and I? You please me, the Devil you do. I would not be Captain Rybnikoff, Russian soldier, if I did not love Russian

writers. Fine chaps! They know how to drink. They know all about life. The Russian's joy is drinking. And I have been drinking since morning, comrade!"

III

Partly out of interest, partly out of professional habit, Stchavinsky collected odd, unusual manifestations of the human soul. He would sometimes observe for a week, or even for entire months, some particularly interesting subject, whom he tracked down with the tenacity of a hunter or an amateur detective. His quarry, as a rule, came within the category of those he called "knights of the sombre planet," plagiarists, graphomaniacs, perverts, dishonest cashiers. But at times he would, in his ardour for the chase, attack the celebrities of the season: pianists, singers, writers, gamblers of insolent good luck, jockeys, athletes and ladies of the half-world. After having somehow got to know his victim, Stchavinsky succeeded in capturing his or her attention by his tender, almost caressing bearing. To this end, he endured anything. He spent whole nights with bores whose sole intellectual baggage consisted in half a dozen truisms and a dozen vague notions on zoölogy. In cafés, he would ply with drink imbeciles or known scamps, waiting patiently for the moment when, under the influence of drink, they would incautiously exhibit the bloom of their abnormality. He buttered people without remorse, being convinced that flattery is the key that opens all locks. He was generous in lending his money, well knowing he would never see it again. In justification of this somewhat morbid form of sport, he might have remarked justly that his psychological interest in the process far outweighed the gain to be derived in his capacity as a describer of public morals.

It gave him a strange, confused, but wholly interesting sensation to penetrate thus the inaccessible corners of the human soul, to note the springs, so often trivial, sometimes shameful, sometimes moving, that induced open actions, to, so to speak, hold in his hand the heart of a man and hear its beat. It frequently happened in the course of

such an investigation, that he almost completely lost his sense of identity; so thoroughly did he work himself into the mind of the individual under study that he actually thought and felt as he did. He spoke his language, employed his favourite expressions, his characteristics, surprised himself occasionally imitating his gestures and the intonations of his voice. Then, having supped his fill of a person, he would let him go. Truth to tell, this passing sensation sometimes cost him dear.

For a long time, no one had inspired him with so deep and curious an interest as this beggar captain with the vinous voice. He held fast to him all day.

Seated in the carriage beside him, he observed him out of the corner of his eye: "No, I cannot be mistaken. That yellow face with its raised cheek bones, that odd look, these short, repeated bows, that rubbing of his hands together, and that nervous, painful air of impertinence. . . . But if that be really the truth, and that Captain Rybnikoff be in reality a Japanese spy, what an inconceivable coolness the man must have to play with such splendid daring, in the very capital of an enemy country, so faithful and cynical a caricature of the broken-down Russian officer! What odd sensations must be his in thus at every moment brushing past an almost inevitable death! Stchavinsky could not fathom so marvellous a rashness, a daring so cool and yet so mad, constituting perhaps the supremest form of patriotic heroism. The mind of the journalist was being drawn ever more to the soul of this strange captain by an acute inquisitiveness joined to a respectful fear.

There were, however, moments when he wondered: "Supposing I am working on a preconceived, ridiculous idea? Supposing, in my mania for sounding hearts, I have simply built a mare's-nest round some old fool of a captain of the kind of Gogul's Kopeikin? After all, in the Ural Mountains, and among the Orenburg Cossacks, there are many of these Mongolian faces of the colour of saffron."

Then he would redouble his attention to each gesture, each play of the facial muscles of the quaint captain. And he listened to every intonation of his voice with a sharpened ear.

Rybnikoff did not pass by a single soldier saluting him without himself raising his hand to his cap with affected haste. Passing by a church, he would every time uncover himself and make the sign of the cross, while observing slyly his neighbour to note whether he had observed him. In the end, Stchavinsky could stand it no longer:

"You are surely exceedingly devout."

Rybnikoff spread out his arms and, pressing down his head between the raised shoulders in inimitably funny fashion, answered:

"The habit of battle, my dear Sir. He who has never known war has never learned to pray. You know that fine Russian saying, don't you? You see, at the front, one learns to pray despite oneself. You will go forward to occupy some position; bullets are whistling, shrapnels and hand grenades are bursting . . . but duty, your oath, says 'forward.' So, mechanically, one repeats, 'Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name . . .'"

And he repeated the whole of the Lord's prayer, putting emphasis on every syllable, undue emphasis.

"He is a spy," finally decided Stchavinsky.

Still, wanting to verify his suspicions, he went on for several hours proving and tormenting the captain. During the dinner, which they had in a *Cabinet Separe*, he told him suddenly, leaning towards him over the table to pour him out a glass of wine:

"Come, Captain. No one can hear us now, and I give you my word of honour that no one in the world will know of our conversation. I am now convinced that you are a Japanese."

Again Rybnikoff smote his breast vigorously: "I am Captain . . ."

"No, no, let's drop that joke. You are very smart, but you cannot get a new face. The line of the cheek bones, the direction of the eyes, the colour of the skin, the form of the head, that sparse and hard black hair on the face, everything reveals your Asiatic origin. But you are quite safe. I will not denounce you, however they might reward me for it; not even if I am called upon to pay for my silence. I will not harm you, do you know

why? Because my heart is full of respect for you, of veneration, of terror even, at your incredible hardihood. As a writer, I have gifts of imagination and phantasy, yet I cannot grasp how one can decide on so stupefying a venture: ten thousand miles away from one's country, in a city full of enemies, risking one's life every moment of the day . . . for, of course, you would be hung without trial if you were caught—to go about in officer's uniform, to insinuate oneself in any kind of company, to make the most dangerous remarks! for the least little slip of the tongue may ruin you in one second. See here, half an hour ago, speaking of a manuscript, you used the learned word *manouskript* instead of the popular term *roukopolis*. A mere nothing, perhaps, but highly significant. For an officer of the line would never use that word, save under some very solemn circumstances or to designate some ancient official archive. But these are all trifles. The main thing is that constant tension of the mind, of the will, that diabolical expenditure of moral force, that I cannot well conceive. To forget to think in Japanese, to obliterate one's very ego, to identify oneself completely with another person, that surpasses the finest tales of heroism told us in the schools for our admiration. Do not trick me any longer, my dear friend. I assure you I am no enemy of yours."

He said these words perfectly sincerely, being moved and inflamed by this heroic figure his imagination had built up for him.

But the captain seemed perfectly impervious to flattery; he listened to Stchavinsky, while winking at his wineglass he was moving up and down the tablecloth. His bluish lips were twitching nervously; on his face, the writer could discern the same hidden raillery, the hatred, persistent, deep and inextinguishable, to the European perhaps incomprehensible, which the Asiatic human beast, when civilised and polished, always bears to the beings of another race.

"Oh, for goodness' sake, drop that nonsense!" replied Rybnikoff indifferently. "I was teased enough in the regiment about my likeness. I tell you I am Junior Captain

Rybnikoff. You know the Russian saying 'Sheepshead, man's head.' Well, one fine day, in the regiment, it happened that . . ."

Stchavinsky interrupted rudely:

"Which was your regiment?"

The captain seemed not to hear, but launched out on old yarns, with a flavour of looseness about them, the surface froth of the conversational kettle in camps and barracks.

Stchavinsky felt himself hurt. Later, seated in the carriage, he again put his arm round the officer and, drawing him to him, whispered:

"Captain . . . no, I ought to say, Colonel, for under that rank you would hardly have been given so delicate a mission. Colonel, I admire your audacity, the limitless courage of the Japanese race. There are times, when I reflect on isolated instances of your almost diabolical bravery, your utter contempt for death, when I thrill with enthusiasm. What immortal tale that is, for instance, of the naval officer who, when summoned to surrender, calmly lit a cigarette and went down to the bottom smoking it, with his whole ship! What an immeasurable strength there is there, and what a sublime contempt for the foe! Then that lieutenant who, all alone, piloted with a small boat a live torpedo up to the tip of the jetty at Port Arthur. When the searchlights lit on him, there was nothing left of him and his torpedo but a big blotch of blood on the cement seawall. Yet the very next day, Admiral Togo was being assailed with petitions from naval lieutenants and middies offering themselves for a repetition of the exploit. But, in a splendid speech, the admiral forbade his officers to thus risk a life that belongs to the country. Devilish fine!"

"What's the name of this street?" asked Rybnikoff, yawning. "After Manchuria, I have lost all sense of orientation in streets. Just think, in Kharbin . . ."

But Stchavinsky, on the full tide of his enthusiasm, went on without paying any attention to him:

"Do you recall that officer who, being taken prisoner, smashed his head against a stone? But the most amazing thing of all was that signature of the Samurais. You have,

of course, never heard speak of that, have you, Monsieur le Capitaine Rybnikoff?" he asked with obvious sarcasm. "No, of course not . . . well, General Nogi had called for volunteers to lead a forlorn hope against the Port Arthur defence by night. Almost the entire detachment offered itself for this task, entailing as it did, certain but glorious death. As far too many of these brave men pressed forward, eager to surpass each other in heroic devotion, they made a written request, some of them, according to ancient usage, cutting the index finger of their right hand to apply it on the document as a kind of seal. Such are the Samurais . . ."

"The Samurais . . ." repeated Rybnikoff very low, his throat seemingly contracted.

Stchavinsky looked at his profile. An unexpected expression of tenderness appeared for the first time on the lips and the trembling chin of the captain. His eyes lit up with a warm eager light, hovering behind the mist of sudden tears he was seeking to keep back. But he pulled himself together almost at once, winked once or twice quickly, and turned towards Stchavinsky a stupidly indifferent face, perfectly expressionless. Then, suddenly, he started cursing loudly, using the strongest swear words in the Russian language.

"What's the matter, Captain?" asked Stchavinsky, almost frightened.

"The papers have lied," said Rybnikoff contemptuously. "Our Russian soldier is just as good. Of course, there is a difference. The Jap fights for his national existence, for glory, for freedom. But we? The Devil knows what we are fighting for. Eh? True is it not? Ha, ha, ha . . ."

At the races, Stchavinsky was taken up with his betting and could not watch the captain the whole time, but during the intervals, he saw him, now on one stand, now on another, upstairs, downstairs, at the buffet, at the cash office. That day, the name Tsushima was on every lip. Racing men, jockeys, bookmakers, were using it plentifully, even down to the dishevelled, doubtful individuals who haunt all race courses. The word was hurled in derision at horses that were not trying. Losers uttered it in

bitter rage, others with an indifferent laugh. Here and there passionate conversations were in train. And Stchavinsky could see from afar the captain with his confident manner, his old soldier's cheek, shaking hands with some, clapping others familiarly on the shoulder. The little, limping figure bobbed up everywhere.

From the race course they went back to the restaurant, and thence to Stchavinsky's. The journalist was a trifle ashamed of his rôle of amateur detective, but he felt he could not leave the game off, although this constant, veiled fight with another man's soul was exceedingly tiring. Being convinced that flattery would not work, he now wished to try to irritate the captain's patriotic sense and thus induce him to speak, saying something that might betray himself.

"Despite everything," he said, "these poor Jap monkeys are to be pitied. You may say what you like, but this war has exhausted the national genius of Japan. It is, in my opinion, like a thin, weak man, who, whether under drink or out of sheer bravado, lifts on his back a weight of six quintals, strains his back and dies of fatigue. You see, Russia is no ordinary country. Russia is a colossus. For her, the Manchurian wounds are but as a leech on a man with plenty of blood to spare. You will see how Russia will pick herself up and become flourishing after the war, while Japan will become enfeebled and will die. Do not speak to me of your civilisation, your good education, European technique. The Jap remains an Asiatic, half man, half monkey. His type is as near to the monkey as is the Bushman's, the Tuareg's or the Botocudo's. You only need look at his facial angle. Just a monkey. What has beaten us is not at all your culture or your political youthfulness, but simply a kind of madness, an epileptic fit. You have heard of the 'raptus,' a condition in which even a feeble woman is enabled to break chains and brush aside the strongest men like mere straw, and the next day she has not the strength to lift an arm . . . ? That's the case of Japan, believe me: to this outburst of energy, there will succeed a period of inertia and impotence. But, naturally enough, your country will first pass through a time of

mad boasting, of outrageous militarism and of insensate jingoism."

"Very right!" shouted Captain Rybnikoff in a sudden fit of silly enthusiasm. "What is true, is true. Your hand, Mr. Writer! One guesses at once you are a man of intellect . . ."

He laughed hoarsely, spit on the floor, clapped Stchavinsky on the knee and shook his arm. The journalist felt ashamed of himself and of his secret tricks and would-be clever psychology.

"Supposing I had made a blunder and Rybnikoff were after all but an old windbag! No . . . it is impossible. But . . . I would be a fine idiot . . ."

He showed the captain his library, his collection of old china, his rare etchings, two dogs of fine breed, Siberian *lulus*. His wife, a little musical comedy singer, he could not show him, for she was on a journey.

Rybnikoff looked at everything with polite but perfectly indifferent curiosity. The host thought he could feel an undercurrent of boredom, or even of contemptuous coldness. The captain took up a review and started reading out a few lines. . . .

"That's a blunder on his part," thought Stchavinsky, on hearing this exceedingly correct, but monotonous reading, and marking the exaggerated precision in the articulation of each individual letter which is common to most good pupils of a foreign language. Rybnikoff may have noticed it himself; for he shut the review and asked:

"You write yourself, don't you?"

"Yes, a little."

"In what papers?"

Stchavinsky named them. This was at least the sixth time that day Rybnikoff had put that question to him.

"Ah, yes, of course. I forgot I had already asked you. Well, do you know what, Mr. Writer?"

"What?"

"Let's do this: you will write, I will dictate. That is it . . . no, I will not dictate . . . I dare not . . ." Rybnikoff was rubbing his hands with a succession of quick bows. "You will yourself set out the facts, and I will just

give you some ideas, some . . . how shall I put it? . . . some memories of the war. Ah, what interesting things I know . . . !”

Stchavinsky, sitting sideways on the table, was considering the captain with a sardonic expression.

“And . . . of course, I am to mention your name?”

“Why not? If you wish it, I have no objection. You could put a note, something like this: These facts have been related to me by Junior Captain Rybnikoff, lately returned from the front.”

“Quite . . . but, tell me, what purpose have you in view?”

“How?”

“Well, in mentioning your name. I suppose that might be useful in giving an account of your work? You could then say, ‘Look at what I got the Russian papers to print. What a clever man am I!’”

The captain, as usual, avoided a direct reply.

“Perhaps you have no time? Other work to do, eh? Well, let’s drop these memoirs. To the Devil with them! After all, one cannot remember everything. Life is more difficult to cross than a field, says a Russian proverb. Eh? True, is it not?”

At that moment, an interesting experiment occurred to Stchavinsky. In his study was a big white table. On the soft, light wood, all his friends and acquaintances inscribed their autographs, with verses, aphorisms, drawings or music. He said to Rybnikoff:

“Look, Captain. This is my album. Will you write something on it in memory of our interesting encounter?” Thus saying he bowed courteously.

“Why not? With pleasure,” Rybnikoff assented. “What shall it be? A few lines of Pushkin or of Gogol?”

“I should prefer something of your own.”

“Of my own? All right.”

He took up the pen, dipped it in the ink, prepared to write, and reflected. Stchavinsky stopped him:

“Wait a second. I have an idea. I am going to give you a slip of paper, and in that box there are drawing pins. Please write me something interesting. Then fold

the paper and fix it to the table with pins in the corners. I give you my word . . . my word as a writer . . . that I will not, for a space of two months, touch that paper. You understand? Come, write away. I will leave you alone so as not to embarrass you."

After five minutes, Rybnikoff shouted.

"Finished?" asked Stchavinsky, coming back into the room.

Rybnikoff stood to attention and put his hand up to his forehead in military salute, saying like a private soldier:

"Aye, aye, Your Excellency!"

"Thanks. Well, now let us go to the Bouffes or some other music hall. I am not going to let you go till the evening is over, Captain."

"Which gives me much pleasure," assured Rybnikoff, clicking his heels, squaring his shoulders and twisting his moustache.

But Stchavinsky did not keep his word to the captain. Under pretext of having forgotten his pocketbook, he went back when they had reached the anteroom. The paper excited his curiosity. He could not resist the temptation, and, having looked round with the furtive glance of a thief, unfolded the paper and read these words, written in a beautiful, clear, extremely elegant handwriting:

"You may be called Ivanoff VII, but you are a fool, nevertheless."

IV

Soon after midnight, they left a suburban music hall in the company of the well-known musical comedy actor, Jenin-Lirsky, the lawyer Sacha Stralman, famed in Petrograd society for his imitations of passing celebrities, and Kariukoff, a young merchant with the reputation of a Mæcenas.

It was a lukewarm night, clear, transparent. In the sheen of the quiet canal waters, the grey stone of the quays reflected itself, and the motionless foliage of the trees. On the heaven's pale, tired-looking face, sleeping clouds drifted by, long, downy flocks of teased out cotton wool.

"Where are we going to?" enquired Stchavinsky, stopping at the garden gate. "What do you say, Marshall Oyama?"

All five stopped on the pavement, a prey to the indecision which so often assails men who have spent a night in pleasure, when, on the coming of dawn, physical fatigue presses its claims against desire for new, well seasoned pleasures.

From the garden, merrymakers of the night streamed out, laughing, singing, clapping their feet noisily on the white, dry flagstones. Music hall *artistes*, with tiny, tripping, provocative steps, came running out, diamonds twinkling on their ears and with enormous hats on their heads, accompanied by elegant men about town, in light suits and a flower in their buttonhole. . . . The habitués of the pavement slid along the railings. In the white light of this May night, their faces, blue or red under their powder, seemed like coarse masks. . . . Two mounted policemen, cursing vilely, were pushing back the spectators with the foaming mouths of their horses.

Near the railing was a group of about twenty persons who had stopped to watch this nocturnal scene. An officer, still beardless, was going great guns, pretending to draw his sword, hopelessly drunk. A policeman, his hand respectfully laid on his heart, was trying in persuasive, falsetto tones, to persuade him to be reasonable. A doubtful individual, with a torn cap, and a vinous, obsequious voice, was repeating: "Spit on them, Excellency! They are not worthy that you should speak to them. Slap my face rather, and I will kiss your hand, Excellency." At the back, a severe-looking gentleman, whose opera hat dug well over his eyes let you see only his black moustache, was humming indistinctly: "What's all this fuss about? Chuck him into the water and have done with it!"

The actor said: "Really, Major Fukushima, we must celebrate worthily the close of this day when I have had the good fortune to make your acquaintance. Let us go to the ladies. Where, Sacha?"

"To Bertha's."

"To the ladies? Why? The Russian proverb says: the

Jew strangled himself out of sheer emulation. Eh? True, is it not? Ha, ha, ha!"

Stchavinsky had introduced Rybnikoff to the young men and they had all supped together at the music hall, and drunk champagne and liqueurs. Incited by Stchavinsky and encouraged by the extraordinary good nature of the captain, they had found it amusing to dub Rybnikoff with the names of various Japanese leaders.

The journalist was fully conscious that he was not behaving well, that he was indeed playing the cad with Rybnikoff. But he quieted his conscience with the thought that he had not voiced his suspicions aloud, and these did not seem to have occurred to the mind of the others.

At the outset of the evening, he noticed that the officer showed himself to be the noisiest and most talkative of them all; he lifted his glass incessantly, rose, sat down again, spilled his wine on the tablecloth, smoked his cigarette at the wrong end. . . . Yet, for all that, Stchavinsky noticed he was drinking very little.

Rybnikoff found himself once more in a cab with Stchavinsky; the latter, who had a very strong head for liqueur, was by no means drunk, but he felt a trifle light-headed, and in his buzzing head the champagne seemed to be fizzing yet. Out of the corner of his eye he was looking at the captain, whose face, in that vacillating light of the white night, had taken on a dull, earthy complexion; the hollows of the cheeks, the lines on the temples, around the mouth and the nose, had deepened. Lying all of a heap, hands deep in his greatcoat pocket, Rybnikoff was breathing with difficulty, open mouthed. All of which gave him a harassed, tortured appearance.

Stchavinsky smelt his breath, strong, acid, as that of a gambler who has spent several nights running at some game of hazard, or a man exhausted by insomnia or intense intellectual work. A feeling of pity, of tenderness swept over Stchavinsky's heart. The captain appeared suddenly to him frail, touching, worthy of compassion. He put his arm around his waist and said in a caressing voice:

"Come, that's enough, Captain. I surrender. I can get nothing out of you, and I beg you to excuse me for having

made you undergo a disagreeable trial. Give me your hand."

He took from his own buttonhole a rose he had bought from the flower girl at the music hall, and fixed it in the captain's greatcoat.

"In token of peace, Captain. We will no longer war with each other."

The cab stopped in front of a small house whose windows were closed and shuttered. The others, who had already arrived, were waiting for them. A tiny look-out window in the great door opened and a grey, watchful, cold eye appeared at it. Then the door opened.

The place was somewhat like a well-to-do club, with a richly appointed entrance hall, a stuffed bear in the lobby, carpets, silk curtains, fine chandeliers and men servants in evening dress with white gloves. It was here the men about town used to go to wind up their evening after the restaurants were closed. One played cards there, and drank the finest vintages, and could make one's choice of pretty, fresh-looking women. They went upstairs, one story. The landing was vast, adorned with green plants, furnished with divans and surrounded by a balustrade.

Stchavinsky went up arm in arm with Rybnikoff. Although he had sworn to refrain from tormenting him, he could not resist the impulse of saying:

"Get up on the scaffold, Captain."

"I am not afraid," he replied. "I walk with death every day." He made an indifferent gesture and forced a tired smile that gave his face a worn-out, aged look.

Stchavinsky, confused, looked at him in silence, being ashamed of his importunity. But Rybnikoff caught himself up almost at once:

"What? Yes, with death. . . A soldier must always be ready for death. Nothing to do about it . . . death is the trifling fly in the ointment of our profession."

Stchavinsky and Mæcnas Kariukoff, who seemed to be honoured and well-known guests, were welcomed with gay smiles and deep bows. A big *cabinet séparé*, well heated, all red and gold, was assigned to them. On the floor was a thick green carpet, and candles burned on the table and in

the corners. Champagne, fruit and sweets were brought. Women appeared, first three, then two more, then a whole bevy that came and went, lovely creatures, powdered, arms, neck and breast bare and white, clad in costly, magnificent, vivid dresses. . . .

"Come, General Kuroki," said Kariukoff, "let us drink to the glorious success of our glorious army in Manchuria. Otherwise you'll remain seated without moving."

Stchavinsky interrupted him with a yawn.

"Enough of that, gentlemen. It begins to be boring. You are trespassing on the captain's good nature."

Rybnikoff retorted: "But it does not annoy me in the least, gentlemen. Let us drink the health of these charming ladies!"

"Lirsky, sing us something," suggested Stchavinsky.

Without waiting to be asked a second time, the actor sat down at the piano and sang, or rather recited, a Gypsy song, cigar hanging to his lip, eyes fixed on the ceiling. The women sang the chorus, shouting shrilly, each trying to drown her neighbour's words. Then Sacha Stralman gave a perfect imitation of a gramophone, mimicked the actors of the Italian opera and the cries of various animals. Kariukoff danced the fandango and everybody demanded new bottles.

The would-be Mæcenas was the first to leave. Stralman and the actor followed. The only ones to remain in the room were Stchavinsky with a bronzed Hungarian girl, and Rybnikoff, who sat near a big blonde, in a dark blue satin blouse cut away square-shaped on the breast.

"Come, Captain, you will have to excuse us," said Stchavinsky, rising and stretching himself. "It is late . . . or rather, early. Come and have breakfast with me at one o'clock, Captain. Madame, you will put the wine to Kariukoff's account. As he loves art, let him have the honour of paying for supper with its disciples. Good night."

The big blonde slung her arm round Rybnikoff's neck and said:

"Let's go, too. It is quite true. It is getting late."

V

It was a gay little room, with pale blue wall paper and a pale blue lamp hanging from the ceiling. On the toilet table was a round doily fringed with blue muslin. On one wall was a chromo, on another a tapestry, along which there was a big brass bed.

"Well, Mr. Officer," said the woman, "are you not going to bed? Say, why do they all call you the Japanese general?"

Rybnikoff, who had for some time had his eyes fixed on her, replied: "Nothing . . . a joke."

"Shall we have some champagne? No? Then, since you are so mean, I'll just have some oranges. . . . You know, I love soldiers, I do. What is your name?"

"Mine?" He coughed and answered in a faltering voice: "I am Junior Captain Rybnikoff, Vassili Alexandrovich Rybnikoff."

"Ah! Vassili, Vassia! I know a charming student called Vassia. If you knew how nice he is!"

She buried herself in a rug and started singing, laughing and winking the while:

"Vassia, Vassia, my Vassia.

What sweet nonsense speakest thou!

"Do you know, I swear you do look like a Jap. And, do you know? You are like the Mikado. We have his portrait. What a pity! But there, you are as alike as two peas!"

"Ah, well. I am quite charmed," said Rybnikoff, petting her.

"Perhaps you are really a Japanese? They say you were at the front. . . . Is it true? . . . Say, is war such a very terrible thing?"

"Oh, not so very very bad. . . . But let us change the subject." He looked tired. "How do they call you?"

"Clotilde. Well, no. I am going to tell you a secret. It is only here I am called Clotilde. My real name is so ugly: Nastia, Nastasia, a cook's name."

"Nastia," he said, while giving her a cautious kiss. "No, I find it pretty." And he repeated the name slowly.

"Oh, it is awful . . . Malvina, Wanda, Jenny, Irma, these are all pretty names." She nestled closer to him. "Do you know, I like you. I like brown-haired men. Are you married?"

"No."

"Now you are telling fibs. Everybody here pretends to be a bachelor. I am sure you have at least ten children!"

The shutters being closed, and the light of the lamp very subdued, it was rather dark in the room. The woman's face no longer resembled the simple, pretty, usual face of a while ago. It changed expression almost every moment, and now seemed refined, tender, mysterious; it recalled to Rybnikoff another face . . . that of one fascinating and adored above all women.

"You are beautiful . . ." he murmured. "I love you . . . I love you."

Suddenly, he uttered an incomprehensible word that sounded perfectly strange to her.

"What is that you are saying?" she asked in her surprise.

"Nothing . . . oh, nothing. . . I love you . . ."

He kissed her hands and neck and hair. A tender, tumultuous passion seized him for this woman, with her big, young, well-groomed body.

"Your hands are cold," she said timidly.

There was in this man something she could not fathom, something alarming, unexpected, yet indefinable.

"Cold hands . . . warm heart."

"Yes, yes, warm heart . . . warm heart . . ." he affirmed, and was speaking like a madman, trembling, panting.

For a long time now, men had, in the eyes of this woman, lost all their individual traits. They had all merged into a single mask, a faun's mask, odious but inevitable, eternally inviting her, with slobbering mouth and misty eyes, dull as mica and their features twisted by sensation. . . . But this little middle-aged officer made a new, a special, an attractive impression on her. His movements were circumspect, calm, ingratiating. His kisses, his caresses, his very touch, had an infinite sweetness. Clotilde's poorly trained spirit found itself unable to analyse this strange and moving enchantment she was undergoing. She could only mutter in her

bliss, trivial, usual phrases: "What an interesting man you are!"

She rose, put out the lamp and went to bed. Through the chinks between the shutters and the wall, the first light of dawn was trickling through and filling the room with a bluish mist. Behind the partition an alarm clock rang hurriedly. Afar, very far, some one was chanting a sad refrain.

"When will you come back?" asked she.

"What?" asked Rybnikoff, half asleep, but now reopening his eyes. "When will I come back? Soon. Tomorrow."

"Oh, you are deceiving me. No, tell me truly: when? I will weary without you."

"We will weary . . . we will write them . . . they have halted in the hills . . ." he was muttering obscurely.

His body was a prey to a heavy torpor. But, as often happens when one has been deprived of sleep for a long time, he could not sleep all at once. Scarce did he begin to lose consciousness and sink into a pleasant, all enveloping oblivion, than he felt a terrible shock suddenly assail his body. He shuddered and groaned and opened his eyes wide with an expression of savage terror in them, and forthwith was plunged into that transitory state between sleep and wakefulness which may best be described as a somnolent delirium, peopled with confused and terrifying visions.

The woman had no inclination to sleep. Sitting on the bed, bare arms round her knees, she was looking at Rybnikoff with a kind of fearsome curiosity. The bluish mist made his face still yellower, still more like that of a dead man. And on it, especially round the eyes and the mouth, she read a tiredness, an exhaustion and a pain such as she had never seen in her life. She stroked softly his rough hair and his forehead with her hand. The skin was cold, but clammy with sweat. Feeling her touch, Rybnikoff emitted a cry of terror and sat bolt upright.

"Who is there? Who?" he cried jerkily, wiping his brow with his shirt sleeve.

"What is the matter, dear?" the woman asked compassionately. "Are you feeling unwell? Shall I give you a glass of water?"

But Rybnikoff had recovered his wits and lain down again.

"No, thanks. I'm all right now. I had a bad dream. Do sleep now, dear, I beg of you."

"When do you want me to wake you?"

"Wake me? . . . in the morning . . . the sun rises early . . . the dragoons arrive . . . we swim across the river . . ."

He stopped speaking and for a few moments remained motionless. But suddenly an atrocious twist of pain disfigured his dead man's face. He turned on his back with a groan. Strange words slipped from his lips, incomprehensible words, sonorous and savage.

Holding her breath, the woman listened. She was seized with that superstitious awe with which one hears the ravings of a sleeping person. Her face bent over his; she did not take her eyes off him. He was silent for an instant, then started again stringing together his long, mysterious sentences. He stopped again, seemingly listening to some invisible talker. And, suddenly, clear and firm, she heard the one word of Japanese that the newspapers had taught her:

"Banzai!"

The girl's heart beat so fast she thought it would burst. She remembered having heard, a while ago, in the red cabinet, the names of Japanese generals being fitted to Rybnikoff. A vague, confused suspicion began to take shape in her dim mind.

Some one was scratching softly at the door.

She rose and opened.

"Clotilde, is that you?" whispered a woman's voice. "You are not asleep? Come over to my room for a moment. Leonce is there."

It was Sonia, the Karaite woman, Clotilde's neighbour and friend. . . .

"All right. I will come in a moment. I have something interesting to tell you. Wait while I dress myself."

"What nonsense. No need to dress."

Clotilde put on a skirt. Rybnikoff woke up.

"Where are you going?" he enquired in a sleepy voice.

"I will be back in a few moments. I must go out,"

she answered, hurriedly tying her dress. "Sleep. I will be back soon."

He heard her no longer. He had sunk into deep sleep.

VI

Leonce was a favourite in the house, from the manageress down to the last chambermaid. In a *milieu* where inaction and monotony naturally encouraged a taste for the romantic, Leonce appeared in the most varied suits, preserving at times a mysterious silence and, which was of capital importance, had more than once proved that policemen had an unbounded respect for him and executed his orders without hesitation. He had used this advantage, with two or three words of thieves' language, to quell a frightful disturbance provoked by drunken thieves, or to force apaches to leave the house in a humble frame of mind. Likewise, he often had a lot of money. So the respect paid him in the house was extended to Henriette, his sweetheart, not, however, unmixed with envy.

He was a young man of dark complexion and scraggy face, firm and large chin, black moustache curling up almost to the eyes, bold, sombre, magnificent eyes. Clotilde found him sitting in shirt sleeves on the sofa, his waistcoat unbuttoned and his tie undone. He was slim and small in stature, but his powerful chest and the muscles showing under his shirt sleeves, right up to the shoulders, were evidence of great physical strength. Beside him was Henriette, her feet on the sofa, and Clotilde opposite. While sipping his liqueur with his red lips, he was relating indolently, in a conceited way:

"They brought him to the police station. He had on him a passport in the name of Kornet Sapietoff, citizen of Polpinsk, or something of the sort. Of course, the rascal was drunk. Just as they were going to stuff him into the cold chamber to take the fumes off him, I happened to enter the Commissary's office. Ha, what did I see? An old acquaintance. Sacha the Butcher. Three murders and burglary in a church. I made a sign to the brigadier on duty and went out as if nothing was up. The brigadier

joined me in the corridor: 'What is it, Leonce Spiridonovitch?' 'Send that fine bird along to the Secret Police for a moment.' They took him there. Not a muscle of his face moved. I looked at him straight in the eye, just like this, and said (here Leonce banged the table with his fist in an expressive manner), 'Is it long, Sacha, since you got back from Odessa?' Of course he played the simpleton. I drew near, gripped his beard; crack! It remained in my hand . . . it was false. 'Confess, son of a dog.' He would give nothing away. 'Then, catch, you rascal.' I gave him one straight at the root of the nose. Another. Till blood came. 'Will you give in?' He was still obstinate. 'Wait a moment, my pretty fellow. Up till now I have spared you, from a feeling of humanity. Now, you have only yourself to blame. Let Arsene Bloch be brought up.' We had a convict of that name who hated this Sacha like poison. Bloch was brought. 'Tell me, Bloch, do you recognise this fellow?' The man laughed. 'I should think I do. It is Sacha the Butcher. How do, Sacha? What's new in Odessa?' This time Sacha gave in. 'No means of getting away with it, when you are about, Leonce Spiridonovitch. Give me a cigarette.' I am always unselfish at such moments. They took the man away. He only glanced at Bloch, but I thought to myself, 'I would not give two pins for Bloch's skin. The Butcher will settle his account all right.'"

"He will kill him . . ." muttered Henriette with servile assurance.

"Of course he will."

He was enjoying his liqueur, well satisfied with the effect he had produced. Henriette was gazing at him open-mouthed, eyes bulging, skin bathed in cold sweat. She clapped herself vigorously on the leg.

"Oh, my God! What a horrible thing! Think of it, Clotilde. And you, you have a queer customer."

"A thief, think you?" asked Leonce with condescension. Clotilde looked offended.

"A thief? The ideal! A drunken officer . . ."

"Bah!" interrupted Leonce, with an air of importance, "there are thieves that make up as officers. Go on, girl."

Then, giving proof of a very feminine faculty of minute observation, she unveiled all the details relating to Rybnikoff, his nickname of "General Kuroki," his Japanese face, his strange, passionate way, his great tenderness, his delirium, lastly, the word *banzai* he had uttered.

"Say, you're not lying, are you?" asked Leonce rapidly, while his dark eyes sent out sparks.

"I swear by God. He has not left. Look through the keyhole. I will open the shutters. You will see for yourself, he is as like a Jap as two peas."

Leonce rose, without haste, but looking very serious. He dressed and felt cautiously the inside left pocket of his coat.

"Come along," he said with decision. "Who brought him in?"

Of the entire company, only Kariukoff was left, whom they could not wake up, and Stralman, who was still in his cups and, with red and tearful eyes, grumbled:

"What officer? To the Devil with him! We made his acquaintance at the Bouffes. Where did he come from? No one knows."

Then he started dressing, snorting furiously. Leonce begged to be excused and went out. He had caught a glimpse of Rybnikoff's face through the opening in the door. He still had some doubts, but he was a good patriot, distinguished for his audacity, and not lacking imagination. He decided to act at his own risk. One minute later he was on the landing, giving a shrill alarm whistle.

VII

Rybnikoff woke up with a start, as if some imperious internal voice had commanded him to get up. One hour and a half of sleep had completely refreshed him. First of all, he directed a suspicious look at the door. He had the impression that some one was staring at him from that quarter. Then his eyes wandered round the whole room, the half-open shutter allowing him to make details out.

The woman was sitting opposite the bed, near the table, silent, pale, gazing at him with her large blue eyes.

"What's happened?" he asked, "tell me what is going on."

She did not reply, but her chin was shaking and her teeth chattering.

In the officer's eyes a light of cruel suspicion appeared. He leaned out of the bed and stretched out his ears in the direction of the door. Numerous footsteps, unused to quiet walking, approached, then stopped.

Silently, supplely, Rybnikoff leaped out of bed and turned the key twice in the lock. At that moment there was a knock at the door. The woman uttered a cry and bent forward on the table, hiding her face in her hands. In a few seconds, the captain was dressed. The knocking was still going on. He had only his cap; his sword and greatcoat had remained downstairs.

He was very pale, but absolutely cool. His hands did not even tremble and every movement was precise, skilful and deliberate.

When he had buttoned the last button of his tunic, he approached the woman and seized her arm so violently that the blood rushed to her head, flushing her face deeply.

Quite low, in a raging whisper, without loosening his jaws, he said to her:

"For you, if you move, or shout, I will kill you."

They knocked again. A deep voice said:

"Open, if you please, Sir."

The captain was not limping now. He ran noiselessly to the window, sprang like a great cat on to the sill, pushed the shutters with one sharp move, opened the window.

Below him was a paved courtyard with a few trees, and sparse grass growing between the slabs.

He did not hesitate one second.

But, just as he was sitting sideways on the window sill, holding on with the left hand, one leg hanging, prepared to let go, the woman shouted shrilly and threw herself upon him and seized his left arm.

Tearing himself from this grip, he made a slip and, suddenly, uttering a feeble cry, he fell heavily, at haphazard, on the slabs below.

Almost at the same time the broken-down door crumbled inwards and Leonce rushed in first, somewhat blown, with flaming eyes and grinding teeth. Behind him, with heavy step, came a huge policeman, sabre in left hand. Seeing the open window and the woman half hanging out, shrieking without ceasing, Leonce grasped what had occurred. Without thinking, without saying a word, as if it had been part of a prearranged plan, he jumped through the window and fell two paces away from Rybnikoff, who was lying motionless on his side.

Paying no attention to the buzzing in his head caused by his fall, nor to the excruciating pains in his belly and his feet, Leonce did not for one moment lose his presence of mind. With one spring, he was on top of the captain, lying on him with his full weight.

"Pinched!" he groaned, pressing on his victim with ferocious strength.

Deadly pale, the captain offered no resistance. In his eyes there burned the flame of an invincible hatred. A pink froth oozed through his lips.

"Don't stifle me," he said in a hoarse breath. "I have broken my leg."

BIELOKONSKOIE

By BORIS PILNIAK

THE sun's rays drifted lazily through the deserted park and through the windows of the drawing room. In the autumnal silence flocks of crows whimpered over the steppe.

All his life had been spent in this house and now he had to leave it forever. The president himself, Ivan Kolotourov, had brought the last instructions, and already strangers had made themselves comfortable in the kitchen.

He had got up with the blue dawn. The day was clear and golden, and the vault of the sky was a deep blue. In days gone by, his father used to go hunting the deer at this season. Today the fields were empty; the dead stalks of the grain emerged from the loam and the wolves were howling. The night before, some one had nailed a red placard on the big door with the words: "The Committee of the Poor Peasants of Bielokonskoie." The peasants in question had made an infernal noise in the large hall throughout the night: for they discussed the measures they wished to adopt. The drawing room was as silent as ever now. In the study here the golden covers of the old editions reflected the sun's rays.

Prince Prozoroski had got up at early dawn, and gone into the fields. All day long he wandered about, drank the last wine of the season, and listened to the noisy chatter of the crows. He thought of the days in his childhood, when he watched the autumnal carnival of these birds and let his fancy drift with their careless flight.

His days were counted now; he had lived for love, many loves had been his. Yesterday suffering, today sadness. He had tasted the poison of the Latin Quarter of Moscow, of books and of women. He had known the autumn sadness of Bielokonskoie, for there he had lived always during that season. He walked across pathless and deserted fields;

in the glens there gleamed the purple poplars; behind him on the hill there rose the white house amid the violet masses of the park trees that were shedding their leaves. The distance was strangely indefinite, of a bluish haze, of a crystalline transparence. His temples were gradually becoming grey—impossible now to stop, to go back again. . . .

In the field he met a *moujik*, immemorial and immovable, being clad in sheep's skin and driving a wagon loaded with bags. The *moujik* took off his cap and stopped his decrepit old horse, while the *barine* passed by.

"How do you do, Your Excellency," said the *moujik*, noisily kissing his hand. Then, pulling up his reins, continued his ride, but stopped once more and cried:

"Listen, *Barine*. I want to tell you something."

He turned round. The face of the *moujik* was covered with a stubby beard and wrinkles—he was an old man.

"What are you going to do now, *Barine*?"

"That's hard to say."

"When are you leaving? They are taking your grain away—those Committees of the Poor. There are no more matches now, none are being made anywhere. I am burning faggots. They have prohibited the sale of grain—just imagine—but I am smuggling it to the station. The prices come from Moscow. Thirty-five, yes, thirty-five! What can you buy with that? But life's still pretty good to us, pretty good. . . . Have a smoke, *Barine*."

He did not smoke—he turned the *makhorka* cigarette around with his fingers. All round them the steppe was brooding—nobody saw them; nobody ever knows when the *moujik* is complaining.

They shook hands and the *moujik* left, while the prince turned around and went back to the house. In the park the water of the pool was cold and as transparent as a glass. The weather was not yet cold enough for it to freeze. The sun was about to sink beyond the horizon of the steppe.

He went into his study, sat down at the writing table and opened a box filled with letters: all his life was there—he could not take it away with him! He poured the

contents on a table, and went to the fireplace in the drawing room. Albums were scattered on a table—and he noticed some bread and a bottle of milk. He lighted a fire in the fireplace, burned the papers, and sat down near the holocaust, drinking the milk and eating the bread . . . he had not eaten all day long.

The blue shadows of the dusk were already penetrating into his room and behind the windows there was a violet mist. The fireplace uttered pale-yellow flames. The milk was not fresh and the bread was stale, he found.

Along the silent corridor the clatter of heavy boots was heard: It was Ivan Kolotourov, the president, in a military coat and with a revolver strapped to his side. He had played with Ivan Kolotourov when they were children. Now the child had grown into a taciturn, hard-working farmer. Without a word, Kolotourov handed him a piece of paper and remained rigid in the middle of the room.

On the paper were the typewritten words:

"To Pomiechtechnik Prozorovski.

"The Committee of Poor Peasants of Bielokonskoie orders you to relieve the Soviet Property of Bielokonskoie and the rulers of the district of your presence immediately. The President: L. Kolotourov."

"Good. I shall go this evening."

"You have no horses."

"I shall walk."

"As you wish. You are not allowed to take anything along."

He turned on his heels, remained motionless for a minute and went out.

At the same time the clock struck the quarter. This clock had once belonged to Kouvaldine, who owned the estate in the eighteenth century; it had been in the Kremlin Palace, and then had followed the Princess Vadkovski to the Caucasus—and how many times had it ticked in recording the march of centuries? He sat down at the window, gazed at the autumnal park and remained in this posture for over an hour without stirring, leaning his elbows on the marble table, deep in thought and memories.

His reverie was interrupted by Kolotourov who came in

without a word, accompanied by two lusty youths. They went to the writing table, and silently began to take away the furniture.

He rose hastily. He put on his big, grey overcoat and his soft felt hat. He went out by way of the terrace and passed before the pavilion of the superintendent, the stables and the distillery, stirring leaves with his shoes. Down into the valley he walked and up the hill, and then decided to go leisurely along the road—a walk of twenty *versts*. It would be the first time he would cover this stretch on foot. How simple everything is and how terrible, merely because it is simple!

The sun had already vanished behind the horizon, and the evening sky was purple. The last flight of crows had disappeared and now silence reigned over the autumnal steppe.

With even, deliberate steps he walked over the solitary trail. It was the first time in his life that he walked so lightly, possessing nothing, not even a goal. Somewhere, very far away, dogs barked in the steppes. Night and fog had descended on the earth, autumnal, taciturn and icy.

After a brisk, uninterrupted walk of eight *versts*, without noticing it, he stopped a minute to tie up his shoe-laces again, when he suddenly felt an infinite weariness creep over him. He had been walking all day and must have already covered some *versts*.

Before him there stretched a little village, Makhmitka, where once, as a young student, he had used to visit an officer's wife. He had secretly spent his nights with her—now he would not go to her any more. The village lay flat against the loam, overtowered by enormous heaps of straw reeking of mingled hay and dung. Dogs received him at the entrance with loud barking—and soon an excited canine chorus resounded about him, while dark spots crouched about his feet.

He knocked at the window of the first *izba*. Behind the window a faggot flickered faintly; he had to wait for an answer.

"Who's there?"

"Open, good people, and let me stay for the night."

"But who is it?"

"A wanderer."

"I am coming out."

A *moujik* stepped out in pink underwear, barefooted, holding a faggot in his hand. He lit a match and looked at him.

"So it's you, Prince? Your Excellency? And how did you get here? Well, come in."

He threw straw on the floor in an enormous heap. A cricket chirped, the place smelled of sweat and dung.

"Lie down, Prince, and sleep with God."

The *moujik* stretched himself near the stove and sighed. His wife mumbled something. The *moujik* got up and said:

"You can sleep, Prince, but you must leave before day-break tomorrow morning lest anyone should see you. You know yourself that there will be trouble if they do. You are still a *Barine*. We have rooted you all out. My wife will wake you up. And now, sleep till then."

The cricket still chirped. In a corner little pigs were crunching. He stretched himself, without taking his clothes off, put his hat on, and felt a cockroach on his neck.

In the silent, grain-filled steppe, covered with thatched cottages, strewn with stacks of straw, with *izbas* full of lice, fleas, bedbugs and cockroaches, smoky and stinking, where men, women, cattle and pigs lived peacefully together, the prince lay on his primitive couch. He tossed from side to side because of the fleas, and reflected that a few centuries hence men would mention the present age sadly and compassionately, as one that had produced one of the most magnificent and grandiose manifestations of the human spirit. A suckling pig came near him, touched him and then rushed off. Through the window there came a brilliant star—a message of infinity. Cocks crowed in the countryside. How did he finally fall asleep? He did not try to find out. At dawn the wife had awakened him and made him go out by the back door. The dawn was blue and cold. A frost of iridescent hues covered the grass. Rapidly he walked, with his overcoat collar turned up, swinging his cane.

At the station, he succeeded in slipping between bags of

flour into a waiting train. He hid himself in an empty car, all covered with white flour. Thus he left for Moscow.

For twenty years Ivan Kolotourov had worked on his small estate. He always rose before dawn and toiled with pick, harrow and flail. He laboured with his enormous, knotty, clumsy hands. Rising early, he ate a frugal meal of bread and potatoes and left his *izba*—to earn his bread by working with wood, stone, iron, loam or cattle.

He was an honest and introspective worker. Already in 1905—returning home on horseback one evening, he had met a man dressed like a worker and given him shelter—the man told that all men were equal before God, that the earth belongs to the peasants, that the *pomichchiks* had stolen the land, and that the time would come when the peasants would have to fight for their rights. Ivan Kolotourov did not understand what he was to do in the matter, but when the revolution came and burst into the steppe, he was the first to act. And he had a sad presentiment.

He wanted to do everything honestly: he did not know how to do anything, except with his hands: digging, working in the fields, repairing his tools—he only could work with his muscles. They sent him to the Committee of the *volost*. Used, as he was, to the idea of rising before the crack of dawn, and to start work at once, he now found that he could not do anything before ten o'clock. At that hour he went to the Committee, where he signed papers with the greatest difficulty—but that was not work! The papers came and were taken away without anybody consulting him; he did not understand, he only signed the slips. He wanted to get down to work. When spring came, he went home to work the fields. That autumn he was elected president of the Committee of Poor Peasants. He established himself in the prince's property, wore his brother's military coat, and strapped a revolver round his waist.

At night he went home, his wife would greet him awkwardly, throw up her hands, prepare his soup. The children sat near the stove and in the corner the suckling pigs were crunching. The faggots spread a dense smoke.

"Sure enough you don't want to eat with us any more after tasting the food in the kitchen of the Master. You have simply become a *Barine*."

He did not reply and sat down on a trunk, beneath the ikons.

"Be on your guard with the people around you. They're all enemies. You have only enemies."

"Keep quiet, you fool! If you don't understand, keep quiet."

"You are ashamed of me and you're hiding yourself."

"Let's go down there and live."

"I won't go."

"Fool!"

"Oh, yes, I have taught you to bark. . . . Swallow your soup. Maybe this doesn't suit you any more after the *Barine's* pork."

To be sure, he had already eaten, and she had guessed it. He had eaten pork. He sat back musing.

"Yes, it's true . . . she is a fool . . ."

He had come to talk about the household and to discuss various other things. He went out without a word. His wife had touched a sensitive spot—all the honest *moujiks* were steering clear of him. The men on the Committee were only those who had nothing to lose.

He went through the village and entered the park . . . in the stable was a light; he went in; the boys had gathered for a game of cards and they were sitting playing, smoking lustily. He stopped and told them good-naturedly:

"Well, such boys! . . . have you nothing else to do? You will set the house on fire."

"We don't care. What's the matter with you—are you defending another man's property?"

"It's not another man's property . . . it's ours."

He turned on his heels and went away. They called after him:

"Father Ivan, have you got the keys to the cellar? There is some alcohol there; if you don't let us have it, we'll break down the door."

The house was dark and silent, it seemed to him as if the prince were still in the drawing room. The vast unac-

customed vastness of these rooms frightened him. He went into the study, the former dining room, and lighted the lamp. All the time he was worrying about the property. The floor was covered with mud from the peasants' shoes, and he wondered why the shoes of the *Barines* did not leave any such tracks. He got down on his knees, gathered the clusters of mud, threw them out of the window, looked for a brush and swept the floor. He went into the kitchen, stretched himself on the bench, without taking his clothes off, and soon fell asleep.

He woke up in the morning, while everybody was still asleep, and went over the estate. In the stable the boys were still playing.

"Why don't you go to sleep?"

"I've slept already."

He woke up the farm hands. One of them, Simeon, came out, scratched his head, and began to burst into obscene words, furious because he had been awakened.

"Don't bother about things that don't concern you. I know myself when I have to get up."

Dawn was clear and cold. The morning light filtered through the windows into the drawing room and he seemed to see the prince going out by way of the terrace and walking towards the steppe.

At ten o'clock he went to the office and began an extremely complicated and, in his opinion, useless task—taking an inventory of all the wheat and grain reserves which every peasant had on hand: a useless task, because he knew by heart how much every peasant had, as everybody in the village knew; and a complicated task, because he had to write a great deal. They had telephoned from the city ordering him to expel the prince; it had taken him an entire hour to prepare the order.

The morning after the prince's departure they began to move everything about. They took the writing table away. They also wanted to take the clock to the study, but one of them noticed that it only had one hand—nobody knew that the old clocks of Kouvaldine could only have one hand which indicated the fractions of five minutes, because the minutes formerly hardly counted. . . . Some

one remarked that the old clock could be taken out of the box, and Ivan Kolotourov ordered:

"Take the clock out of the box. Tell the carpenter to make a closet out of it for the office. But don't make so much noise with your feet."

That night a woman came running to the house. Something had happened in the village: a young girl had been assaulted the night before; nobody knew who was responsible. It might have been some one from the village or one of the men who had come from Moscow to look for flour; the woman sought the members of the Committee. She remained standing beneath the windows and swore at them with shrill voice. Ivan Kolotourov chased her away and beat her. She ran shrieking back into the village.

It was already getting dark. The house was plunged into silence. Outside, the farm hands sang with drunken voices. Ivan went into the study, sat down on the divan, experiencing a delightful feeling of comfort, and discovered a little electric lamp which had been forgotten. He amused himself playing with it, lighted it, and noticed the clock in the drawing room which was lying on the floor. He asked himself for a minute what to do with it, then lifted it and threw it into the latrines.

At the other end of the house the boys had gathered into groups, and one of them was hammering on the piano. Ivan Kolotourov would have liked to chase them away in order to prevent them from throwing everything into disorder, but he did not dare. Then he suddenly felt a great pity for himself and his wife. He wanted to return home, to his stove. . . .

A bell rang out announcing dinner. Slowly he sneaked to the cellar where the alcohol was hidden; he poured himself out a glass, emptied it, succeeded in closing the cellar, but was unable to reach his house. He fell down in the park, remained stretched out for a long time, and tried to get up. All this time he wanted to say something, to explain what troubled him, but finally he sank back, exhausted.

The autumn night crept up, dark and cold. It crept over the deserted, icy and savage steppe.

SUNSET

By V. BLASCO IBANEZ

THE DUCHESS OF PONTECORVO left her automobile on the outskirts of Roquebrune and started ascending a small path of the Alpes Maritimes, leaning on the arm of a servant. It was a narrow, tortuous path, paved with large irregular stones curiously dovetailing into each other. Further on, these paths change into tunnels when they pass the first story of some white house obstructing the road, as in a Mohammedan town.

Every fine evening the old lady used to climb up there from the level of the Mediterranean to see the sunset from the garden round the church. She had discovered this place some weeks previously and spoke of it with enthusiasm to her friends.

A vanity similar to that which animates explorers of unknown countries animated the old lady and made her endure easily the fatigue of climbing up these difficult and mediæval tracks where, besides the donkey or the mule, no means of locomotion was possible.

Advancing age brings either mummification or stoutness; the duchess was afflicted with the latter. She walked leaning on a gold-knobbed Indian stick which she had inherited from her late husband, the Duke of Pontecorvo, a marshal of Napoleon III and a hero of the Austrian campaign. Yet she was always *en route*, with an ardour almost juvenile. Her face bore the noble marks of former beauty, of a Marie Antoinette style, as her admirers had been used to say. But her aquiline nose almost touched her chin now, and there was nearly always a tear trembling in her aged eyes. From under her hat fell curls of white hair, too abundant to be genuine. But what chiefly attracted attention to her aristocratic and still stylishly dressed person, was a marvelous necklace, the value of which was put by expert jewelers at one and a half million.

It was the width of a large dog collar and composed of several rows of pearls, it completely covered the neck above which hung plump cheeks whose former rosy colour had deepened into purplish red.

She entered the now deserted church, while the servant moved away and stood, deferentially waiting, at one of the lateral doors that threw a small square patch of light on the church floor of great flagstones, mottled here and there by tiny sun rays as with gold.

The servant remained there while the duchess started on her rounds of her newly discovered dominions. She left the church by the garden door and followed a very narrow path, bordered by hedges, pounding her stick on the red stones made unequal by time and weather.

She loved that small church garden, chiefly because of the influence contrasts have on men's nature. It was indeed the very opposite of her own splendid garden which could be seen below, by the blue Mediterranean waters.

Everything grew freely on the terrace behind the little church; roses formed a scented hedge and the trees almost leaned against each other for lack of space. Wild flowers blossomed side by side with garden ones with the usual hardihood parasites show in the struggle for existence, and all manner of insects, wasps, ants and gayly coloured beetles crawled and buzzed in joyous swarms in the groves.

From this marvelous balcony of nature, several hundreds of feet high, the duchess liked contemplating the sea, a sea greater than that to be seen from her villa on the coast. Then she would admire the far flung beauty of the Alpine range, with its lofty peaks and its line of gulfs and peninsulas into the plain.

On the left, the hills round Nice, which itself lay hidden from her sight, raised their sombre blocks into the sky, now reddened by the approaching sunset. Much farther away, the Monaco peninsula and, further still, the little town of Monte Carlo with its wealth of palaces and gardens. Right at her feet was Cap Martin, and her own villa, which the late Duke of Pontecorvo had had built between the tall pine trees. On the same promontory, in the midst of a garden that seemed to kiss the sea, was the house of

her friend and protector, Eugénie, the late Empress of the French. A few other houses too, all of noble owners, staunch friends of dethroned kings.

A short space away one could see the palace of John Baldwin, the mining king, whom many considered to be the richest man on earth.

The duchess had reached a seat at the end of the garden, where she spent a whole hour, watching the slow and beautiful death of the day. No one would come to disturb her solitary meditation here. She conjured up visions of the past, and of her dead husband, whom she had loved dearly.

She felt like that music-loving king who wished an opera sung in an empty hall, with himself as sole spectator and listener. She wanted the whole beauty of this wonderful sunset for herself.

As she was leaving the spot, she caught an odour of tobacco mingling with the scent of the flowers. She turned and saw a man who had invaded what she fondly fancied to be her dominion, and who was contemplating the view as if it were his right, quietly smoking a cigar the while.

The duchess resented the intrusion and was just going to ask the stranger who he was, when a change suddenly came over her face on recognising him. With a somewhat exaggerated smile, she turned to him:

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin, what a pleasant surprise!"

II

John Baldwin, multi-millionaire, had bought the Cap Martin palace in New York after seeing some photographs of it. Whenever, from time to time, he came there to spend a few weeks, he became the centre of attention. Along the whole Riviera, from Cannes to Mentone, no one was better known; not even deposed kings or presidents of South American republics in revolt.

Local authorities were always soliciting his help for charitable objects; public societies sent deputations to welcome him when he arrived, and concert organisations disputed among themselves the honour of his patronage.

The millionaire was in one respect like God: he could be

felt, but not seen. Visitors who were not of his intimate friends were always received by one of his private secretaries; he himself only appeared at the last minute, cheque-book in hand.

Those who had been fortunate enough to catch a sight of him at some hotel in Nice, or at the gambling tables in Monte Carlo, would point him out to their friends: "That is the famous Baldwin, the millionaire!" And people would exclaim in wonder: "What? That old man who looks so unassuming?"

He went about almost poorly clad. In his garages were automobiles of the best makes, but he nearly always went on foot.

His private secretaries were gentlemen of notable elegance, and he appreciated this as being a reflection of his own power.

Those who had had business with him said: "He has sixty million dollars to his account and does not know what to do with them!"

Which was perfectly true.

He had no love for money. "What can I do with it all?" he used to say. His mining and industrial enterprises were so prosperous that vast profits flowed in incessantly and remained in enforced idleness.

The Duchess of Pontecorvo had known him since the first time he had come to Cap Martin.

It was a case of friendship between a famous woman and a famous man. To her, modern times seemed very far off, since the last war there were no emperors left in Europe, and the few kings remaining lived more democratically than presidents of republics. The world was ruled by men of the type of John Baldwin, multi-millionaire.

The duchess, who had recently divided her large fortune among her children and kept only the Cap Martin Villa for herself, felt a kind of respect for this modern potentate; which explains why she had addressed him so amiably although he was in her eyes at the moment a trespasser on her domain.

Hitherto she had always met him in drawing rooms, at tea parties; for the first time she was seeing him in the

open, in this rustic garden that seemed to shed a light of youth over men and things.

Formerly a big, strapping man, he had become bent and wrinkled with age, but was devoid of all infirmity. He had a rather large head, a high forehead and a flat red nose like a ripe fruit; his pinched lips were very thin and his protruding lower jaw bespoke great strength of character. His eyes were the only thing left to him of his past handsomeness; they were deep and piercing and had the faculty of compelling most other men to lower theirs first.

Seeing the duchess, Baldwin approached her, took his cigar from his mouth, a fine Havana, much chewed by his gold-mounted teeth. He shook hands with her and told her he had heard there was a wonderful view from the church, so he had come to have a look at it.

"You spoke of it the other day, at the Charltons', if you remember, and inspired me with a desire to see it. It is very beautiful . . ."

"Yes," replied the duchess, "it is indeed beautiful!"

And they stood in silent contemplation, awed by the majesty of the scene.

"It is a great pity," began Baldwin after a while, "that most people grow old without having seen the beautiful things of the world. In our youth, our dreams and ambitions make us blind to so many things. I know men who, if they could leave the skyscrapers of New York and come here, would wonder very much at seeing old Baldwin admiring the sea and the sky as any other person would. They would not understand it at all. Lack of knowledge of everyday life!"

The duchess nodded, apparently without understanding very clearly.

"Even you had to grow old before you could really see these beautiful things. A woman is always more poetical than a man and, as a rule, has more opportunity in her youth of cultivating the sentimental side of her nature. But I believe in those days you were further from nature than from the pompous fêtes of the Tuileries."

The duchess nodded again, in satisfaction at so great a man showing such an interest in her. For the moment the

pride of the courted beauty revived: Baldwin the potentate had actually toiled up to this forsaken spot just because she had spoken about it!

"I have suffered a great deal, Mr. Baldwin. Our lives are like our houses; no one knows what goes on inside save we ourselves."

She talked about her brilliant youth, and the American, to whom many of her triumphs were familiar, listened to them as if he heard them for the first time.

The Duchess of Pontecorvo was of Spanish birth. A friend of the Empress Eugénie, she had followed her to Paris where she had shone as one of the most beautiful of the band of brilliant women who had enlivened the Tuileries. As the family was ruined, the Empress had exerted herself to marry her friend to one of the wealthy noblemen attached to the court. The one eventually favoured was the Marshal of France, who, for his services during the Austrian campaign, had been created Duke of Pontecorvo by Napoleon III.

The duchess was quick to recognise the differences in taste and character between her husband and herself. But the elegant life of the court did much to smooth over the difficulties and made her married life more than tolerable. Then came the fall of the Empire and the separation from many of those she associated with habitually. The Marshal, painfully affected by the military disasters of 1870, died leaving her a widow with two sons. In due time these sons in their turn founded families of their own and received the greater part of their late father's fortune. So the old lady had left Paris, which no longer held anything of interest to her.

She had come to Cap Martin with the intention of spending the rest of her days in what had been for many years her favourite winter resort. This had the double advantage of helping her to conceal the declining state of her health and of allowing her to go on associating with the *grand monde*. From time to time the Empress came to visit her and they chatted about their departed friends. The only remains of the duchess' former splendour were her wonderful pearls. They reminded her of the glories

of the past; besides, to have parted with them would have been equivalent to a public confession of poverty.

"Remember, Mr. Baldwin," she said, "old age too has its sweets and its pleasures. I have something now I never attained before: tranquillity. The noisier joys of youth have their attendant sufferings and difficulties. We have none of what we used to call love, but in its stead we have friendship, and that nearly always is more enduring. You cannot understand what a woman feels when she is known to be beautiful and desired. She lives in a state of perpetual alarm, and every man who approaches her for the first time appears to her in the light of an opponent. It is the life of a soldier, ever in the midst of foes. Nowadays I can live and talk in peace, which I never could do formerly. Man is no more my enemy. In old age, in fact, there are neither men nor women; only companions. As the body loses its importance, we develop that immaterial thing in ourselves that we call the soul. The confidences made to me by young and pretty women sometimes make me envy them for a moment. But I soon say to myself: Why envy them? They in their turn will grow old and will feel as I feel now. I have the reposeful sensation of living for myself, of feeling myself live, of quietly enjoying things we would never have thought of in our younger days. Believe me, Mr. Baldwin, I do not mind my old age, and I suppose you, who have seen and worked such a lot, share my sentiments."

The millionaire answered with a touch of melancholy: "If we could only remain old always! If there were no death!"

The duchess, who had been speaking with quite juvenile vivacity, hung her head and said in an equally sad tone:

"True . . . true. . . . Aye, there is Death!"

III

There was a long silence, which Baldwin broke at length to express his thoughts on what the duchess had said.

Although his present life presented a marked contrast to his past, he did not mind his present inactivity, believing

himself entitled to a rest after his laborious life. He had always been known as one of the greatest of the world's men of action. His existence seemed to have no reason for continued development. John Baldwin had covered a good deal of paper in his time. Human life, according to him, depended mostly on the convenience of men.

"You, Duchess," he said, "cannot grasp the size of my undertakings. Like all the world, you know merely that I am very rich, but the word rich is utterly inadequate to express my fortune. Only a cataclysm could ruin me, one that would suppress half the earth. I want to limit the production of my mines and factories simply in order to check this uninterrupted flow of money into my coffers. I leave enormous sums idle, unproductive, simply because money has no further meaning for me. I could have anything man can possibly wish for, but in my old age, none of the things men care for tempt me. I have no children and my chief occupation nowadays is so to order my wealth that it may be of some use after my death. I have founded museums, libraries and universities. I give money to charitable institutions, although I am too well informed to have much faith in their efficiency. I give subsidies to scientific enterprises and to inventors. It is a good thing to feel that the young are working to benefit humanity thanks to me. I am myself incapable of enthusiasm, so let the young have it for me."

After a brief silence, he went on sadly:

"Yes, progress interests me, as business problems did in days gone by. Sometimes when I see a newsboy, or a beggar asking for alms, I reflect that these wretches will probably be alive when I am gone. So I don't help them, for I know their living will not be of use to their fellow men. I say to myself: These brutes will witness things that will not be seen by me. That is the sure test to me of the usefulness of my fortune. Also of the stupidity of those who envy me for it. The famous Baldwin, with his two thousand million dollars will not see what will be seen by that street Arab who picks up the cigar stump I have thrown away.

"I wish sometimes I could project myself twenty years

back. What are twenty years to a young man, to any of the young men I employ? The *quasi* certainty that they will live another twenty years allows them to enjoy, to have pleasure and ambitions, whereas I, who have been called the world's greatest uncrowned king, who have often held in my hand the issues of war and peace, have nothing more to look for or to do. Twenty years of extra life would not help me in any way."

Another spell of silence followed these words.

"I have been everything. I have had everything. For that very reason I have no interest in everyday life. But even if I wanted to live longer, I know my riches could not lengthen my life. It is my present lack of occupation that gives me these thoughts and lets me see naked realities. Formerly, I used to tackle difficulties and break down obstacles. Poets and dreamers have another, different world before them, and it makes them see all things in a different light. I was ambitious, as are all conquerors, so long as I felt I had to fight for life. That gave me enthusiasm. Now, since I have nothing to do, I realise the vanity of human existence. I see it as a man might in fancy see the skeleton in each human being he passes. . . . Year after year I used to wait anxiously for my business balance. That meant to me either success or complete ruin. I lost my fortune four times, and every time I won it back again larger than I had lost it. Now, even the most urgent telegram gives me no thrill. I know that there is no sort of news that can alter the course of my life. Having fought for a fortune, I had the further task of defending it, and that is even more difficult. But my present possessions are so vast that they defend themselves. They don't need me. So, again I ask, of what further use is life to me?"

The duchess, used to the commonplaces of drawing-room conversation, was on the point of telling him about charities the rich ought to support, but she checked herself with the thought that John Baldwin had, a few moments previously, said he did not believe in such charities, although he gave money to them as to all who asked for it.

Anyway, it appeared to her to savour of the vulgar to press such obvious ideas on the millionaire just after the desperate confession he had uttered, and under the thought-provoking influence of this spot.

"I hope for nothing," he resumed, "I wish for nothing. I do not want to die. Death to me seems an absurdity. Who can explain it? Life is complicated and mysterious. Simplicity is only an illusion. Only these things are simple which we can see with our short-sighted eyes, and they are too few. All the rest is complicated. Yet death is sad! We spend our life repeating truths that have been in men's mouths for thousands of years. We repeat them mechanically, without clear understanding of their import. Only the approach of death reveals to us the vanity of life.

"The idea of equality before death is a lie. It may be true for people who have spent a miserable life. It represents the final blow to futility and envy. But how can I bow down before death? I, who have won all my battles and who cannot conceive another issue than victory?

"Another lie is the idea that death will be a sleep where people acquire new strength for a second life. Who knows whether there is a second life? Religion, that balm to human ignorance, tells us there is, but what proof of it can it give to those who have lost their faith?

"The comparison of winter to old age is also a lie. Every winter is followed by the birth of spring and the splendour of summer. But what can we expect after *our* winter? Any kind of hypothesis will serve. All our eyes can see of it is that our bodies turn to dust and that in a few years our very memory is effaced. After that, nothing more remains . . ."

He stopped to look at the sunset, slowly disappearing behind the Alps. Its last rays of dark gold fell into a purple sea. A few clouds lit up a bright red, as if by internal combustion.

The millionaire was hitting the earth with his stick.

"Your death, too, will be a lie. . . . You are told you will die tomorrow and will arise again in thousands of centuries. And that is why you will die in splendour, like an

actor slowly dying on the stage, thinking of the good supper he will enjoy in half an hour's time. The worst of it is we know that there is no cure for death and it only comes once. We can only die this once. We are then swept away from life by those who are entering it with the strength and hopes of youth. Many a time, looking at the tall trees of the forest I have envied their slow, resigned death. They have no insolent youth crowding round them and watching them decline.

"All trees seem to be of the same age and to be doomed to die at the same time. Human beings are not so lucky. They die at different times, surrounded by insolently exulting youth. That is why our lot appears to us so cruel."

The duchess continued her nods of assent, through respect for the speaker, though the pertinacity with which he persisted in talking of death began to have an unpleasant effect on her. Why could he not think of more agreeable things, talk about their common friends on this Côte d'Azur, and of the trivial love affairs among its young people?

It seemed a bad thing to talk so much about death. One ought to forget it, she thought, to let it come of itself, since come it must, but not call for it.

But John Baldwin, accustomed to speak with authority at conferences of world-ruling capitalists, could not brook objections. So the duchess thought it wiser to preserve silence. The American proceeded to dilate on the necessity to complain against fate.

"Our life is a bad business. There seems to be some evil spirit bent on torturing us. From our youth up we toil to make a path for ourselves through life. We are hypnotised by riches and fame, and to attain these ends we spoil the best years of our life and turn aside from its real joys. We succeed only after we are quite old, and, having conquered fortune and fame, we wonder of what use they are to us."

The old financier went on talking in a low voice, as if speaking to himself, and applying to the state of things in this world the corrective of his own philosophy.

He must have been amazing to witness at work, this

man, in his fight against destiny. Now he had earned all there was to be earned, one would have liked to have seen him twenty-five years before, when he was treading about Wall Street in search of a dollar, wretchedly poor, but strong in health and ambition.

He was proceeding: "Just think: I have spent entire years without seeing the sunlight, imprisoned in some dark office, struggling for money. Yes, money has a strange fascination for those who do not possess it, but need it. Death calls to us almost in the bloom of youth, and accompanies us for the remainder of our days, threatening but ever holding back its final blow. We think of death at thirty, just as passion assails us with greater force even than in early youth. The first tooth to fall, the first hair to turn grey, remind us that death is waiting for us. But we remain blind and deaf. We have hope, a companion that leaves us only in our hour of agony. So we try to convince ourselves that we shall not die.

"Nearly every man believes himself immortal. He knows he will die some day but never thinks death will occur on any particular day, possibly tomorrow, and that this tomorrow may for him be a chapter without end. To die seems natural enough to us, but every one thinks it ought to be some other man's turn, not his. We are deaf to the real call of death, but nevertheless go on talking about it.

"The youth of today would not understand us if it heard us. One must be old before one can visualise the wretchedness of life. Our existence passes without a thought of death's strength, for the problem is usually solved for us by our religious beliefs."

The duchess interrupted him to speak of the good influence of illusions, without which life would be impossible. The great man moved his head in assent.

"This sweet lie," he said, "is essential for the continuance of our existence. We are all of us victims of illusions, even those among us who appear the least sentimental. In all my own life I have had these illusions and desires and they have helped me through the most difficult moments of life."

IV

The War of Secession had caused him to lose many of his enterprises and, since he was a soldier then, had also prevented him from setting to work to repair the mischief. He earned his first thousand dollars while traveling through Europe, was in Paris in the last years of Napoleon III and visited the famous Exhibition, that concrete proof of imperial glory on the eve of imperial ruin.

"I remember, Duchess," he said, "seeing you for the first time. All Paris admired your beauty and the splendour of your entertainments."

"Oh," said the old lady, greatly moved, "what a pity I did not get introduced to you then! I should so like to have seen you when you were young."

The richest man on earth smiled incredulously. The idea that, in those days, he might have been present at one of the Duchess of Pontecorvo's balls, greatly tickled him.

"The Baldwin of those days, although young and full of vigour, was not as presentable as the old man he has gotten to be now. His manners were brusque, his hands coarsened by toil. No, John Baldwin would have cut but a sorry figure in the great drawing rooms of those days. He could but watch these beauties from afar. One day he saw the Empress passing on her way to the Exhibition, and in her train was the Duchess of Pontecorvo, in the full bloom of her beauty."

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin," sighed the old lady again, blushing the while so that her ivory cheeks turned quite rosy.

The American went on:

"I saw you then, and have never forgotten you since. We all need something seemingly inaccessible, whereon to keep our eyes fixed. Only thus can we preserve our illusions. For me, that something was you. We are both now of such an age, Duchess, that I may well confess this without causing timidity on either side. During the years of my toil, I had three great desires: I wished for a palace with an immense garden and a yacht wherewith to sail the distant seas. The third desire, and the best, in reality

indeed the first, was to have a wife who should equal the Duchess of Pontecorvo . . . or, the duchess herself. Then, I felt, life would have nothing more to give me. I have palaces now in many parts of the world, I could have a whole fleet of yachts if I cared. The only thing in this triumphant life of mine I have not had, could not have, was the Duchess of Pontecorvo."

"Oh, Sir! How could you think of such a thing!"

"Because I could not realise then that I would attain what I now have.

"I will not say I thought of you all the time. I had very many things to think about and do in those days. But I swear that in the few free moments I could devote to the pleasures and illusions of life, my first thought was always for you. I married. I loved my wife. But your vision did not leave me. If I did not come for you on my wife's death, it is that I came to the conclusion I was not up to your standard. I was old even then, old in ideas. You, too, would not be so young as you had been. You had sons and they were married. Why tamper with the only lasting illusion I had ever had?"

He stopped for a moment, during which the old lady tried to form a mental picture of what he must have looked like in his youth.

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin, why did you not try to get to know me at that time?"

The millionaire, as if he had not heard her, proceeded:

"Now I have found you. I was afraid to find you different from what you were in the old days. Now it does not matter that we should meet, for you are no longer the woman, neither am I the man, of those days in Paris. We are both old, and talk of dead friends. I wish you could see how even in age I have preserved you in my imagination. Time and fashions do not change for me. Women who do not interest us seem grotesque in a new-fashioned dress, but a man always sees the woman he loves as she appeared to him the first time. I will always see the young Madame la Duchesse de Pontecorvo, with her ample crinoline, just like that of the Empress, or any of the other brilliant ladies of the court of the Tuileries. I could not

see you otherwise if I tried. You have been loved as few women have been loved . . . it was a love only one of the pair felt, the other not being in a position even to guess . . .”

“Oh, Mr. Baldwin,” said the old lady in a tremulous voice, as if on the verge of tears, “why did you not speak before? Why did you not say then what you have just said now?”

The man shrugged his shoulders. He had a vivid conception of reality. That which, in John Baldwin, millionaire, seemed to her an unpardonable sin of omission, would have seemed to her an unpardonable sin of commission in John Baldwin, unknown, poor and uncultured stranger.

The sun was setting. As its last rays were dying, the hills assumed a tint of marvellous pink. In the reddened sky, the evening star was already twinkling. Over on the Italian side, the sky had preserved its blue colour, but had darkened and deepened its blue, and studded it with stars.

The wind from the hills had risen now and was caressing with its touch the garden of the little church.

The old lady, moved by his words, was unconscious of this sudden change of temperature, which ordinarily would have caused her to almost run back to the car.

She repeated: “Why did you not speak before? Why did you not tell me?”

And again he shrugged his shoulders.

In truth the illusion was quite dead. It had died a long time ago, nearly a lifetime. Only tonight he had felt a craving to confess his sentiments to some one. He had seen the duchess at Cap Martin, and he had promised himself that, some day, he would tell her these things. So that is why he had come out to look for her in the church garden.

But, he reflected, if she were to guess that, she would feel too highly flattered, and she was hardly worth that. Life anyway was nearly over. Peace be unto the dead!

The woman, still immersed in her sentimentality, did not wish to banish the incident from her mind. Here was an illusion that had unexpectedly presented itself, and she clung to that illusion as if it could save her from the curse

of awaiting death. After half a century of sleep, her woman's vanity had awakened. Eighty years of age, and still hearing words of love. . . . And from one of the greatest on this earth!

Baldwin was visibly disturbed by the coolness of the temperature. He coughed.

"Let us go," he said. "To remain would be dangerous for both of us."

He pointed to the fast darkening horizon:

"The sun has set. It will set again tomorrow and the next day, and ever after . . . but we . . .?"

The old lady was leaning on his arm; she had begun to walk, hitting the ground with her walking stick. She did not seem to hear his words or to understand what had been said. She was still living in the past. How sweet that evocation of the past had been!

They were going back now, heads bent to pass under the hanging boughs, and her tremulous voice still repeated:

"Why did you not speak before? Why did you not tell me long ago the things you have told me now?"

THEODORE

By GUSTAV HELLSTROM

EMMA ANTONSSON was the last to leave the meeting for the unemployed. After it was all over and most of the people had trooped out into the autumn rain which came down at an angle of forty-five degrees, she had struck up a conversation with a married friend of her own age, a woman who, like herself, worked at one of the large factories. It was no gay conversation. Two forty-five-year-old working women seldom have anything very cheerful to tell each other, especially in days of unemployment. But tonight the conversation was not only depressing; in the end it had irritated Emma Antonsson. As if she could help that her married friend had lost her job in the paper factory while she herself had been kept on for four miserable days a week! One had to be just, in this world, even in one's misery! The talk had degenerated into a wrangle, with bitter, cutting retorts, and of these Emma Antonsson's were without doubt the least effective since she was the one who was best off, from a material standpoint. "But you've your husband, and he hasn't been fired." "But Enberg and I, we've seven children, and you haven't any!" "But how can I have children when I haven't any husband! You're not going to blame me for not having run around in my young days like so many others, are you?" "Well, you're better off than the rest of us." "You don't expect me to go and give up my job just because you've lost yours, do you?"

At last the watchman forced them to make for the door by putting out the electric lights, all except a bulb over by the stage. But Emma Antonsson did not leave. Now that the other had gone it somehow seemed to her that in spite of everything she had been in the wrong and the arguments which a moment ago seemed absolutely indisputable now suffered from a very serious flaw springing from the fact

that she was better off than Elin Enberg. There was no getting away from it, and she felt suddenly ashamed and increasingly sorry at having revealed, too openly, her own advantages. That was why she stood there, irresolute. She felt an absolutely unreasonable and instinctive need of appealing to the watchman. Hadn't she been working at Yllet factory since she was sixteen? In other words, for twenty-nine long years? And should she now, in her old age, be blamed because she hadn't done a lot of silly things when she was young, like so many other girls, and called a lot of misery down on her shoulders? Was it more than right that she who had been so long in a place should be allowed to keep it?

The watchman shrugged his shoulders and stopped her flow of words by a mumbled remark that it was good that there was somebody who wasn't too badly off in these rotten times. The answer didn't please Emma Antonsson; she suspected an insinuation back of it and with a snort about spiteful good-for-nothings, she left the hall.

But just as she stepped into the lobby she shrunk back, frightened. She had seen—or she thought she had seen—a shadow glide up the stairs to the gallery, and as she stood there in her fright she heard, above the violent thumping of her heart, a very real and sort of crackling noise on the stairs. In her agitated state of mind she did not realise exactly what was taking place and her sudden fear of the passing shadow somehow blended with her subconscious feeling of guilt at being better off than so many others, and all at once her indolent and at the same time turbulent imagination terrorised her with the thought that she was being followed. Perhaps some one was lying in wait for her, perhaps some one wanted to get even with her because she was a little more fortunately situated than the others. Things she had seen in the movies suddenly rose before her and although she was not usually timid, she screamed and rushed toward the door.

"There's some one hiding on the stairs," she cried to the watchman when he appeared.

The watchman went into the lobby and peered up the stairs to the gallery.

"What? You here again?" he called to the invisible entity. "Get down out of there, you know you can't sleep there."

Dragging, shuffling steps were heard while the watchman remonstrated. "That's the third time this week. It's tough on you, poor devil, but what's to be done about it? You know the regulations."

Before him and Emma Antonsson stood, a moment later, a young, exceedingly emaciated man, or boy, rather, with dark eyes, brown, curly hair peeping out under the wet sports cap, and a complexion so pale and white that the dark eyes looked like black holes in a cranium with skin drawn over it. His clothes were threadbare and sent out a stench of rain and dirt. The opening of the upturned coat collar gave a glimpse of a shirt that was gray for having been worn too long. He stared shamefacedly on the wet, muddy floor as if seeking a hole to creep into, raising his eyes as high as the watchman's chin, every now and then, as if attempting to beg, both hopelessly and helplessly, for something which the pouring rain outside made too evident for words.

"I know," said the watchman, "it's hard on you, you poor crow, and with such devil's weather I suppose I'll have to let you sleep on a bench in here. But it'll be getting cold here, too, you know, as cold as on the barge where you've been staying."

The watchman turned to Emma Antonsson.

"He's a sailor and he hasn't even a place to sleep."

The blood rushed suddenly to the young man's face. For a few seconds the pale skin seemed to glow with a red light from within, at the thought of getting a roof over his head. And this red glow, this suddenly flaming, hungry gratitude made Emma Antonsson realise that he was not an ordinary tramp. She listened to the pouring rain outside, she looked at the thinly clad boy in whose dark, pleading eyes hope had been kindled, and from these two sensations of sight and hearing her thoughts flew to the shiny black raincoat she was wearing, which no rain could soak through. And her thoughts went even further, they followed her home to her own room where there was a fire in

the stove and where she had both bed and sofa. And like a red thread through these (for her) appalling contrasts ran the gist of the tiff with Elin Enberg: you are better off than we. It cut her sharply and bitterly and the difference between her own and the young man's position and the quarrel all became one, and melted, so to speak, into one resolution.

"He can sleep on my sofa tonight," she said to the watchman.

Again the stranger's cheeks became fired with a rush of blood and a light shone far back in his dark brown eyes, while a soft smile came over the full lips which, in the midst of the general pallor, stood out as the red lips of a consumptive.

Not until then, when a little more life and colour came over him because of the bit of unexpected good luck, did she think of him as anything else than an object of pity. She said suddenly, with a sterner tone in her voice:

"How old are you, anyway?"

"I'm nineteen."

"All right," she said curtly, "I'm forty-five, so don't get any crazy ideas in your head. He won't think anything funny, will he?"

She didn't look at him, but at the watchman, as if she put the question to him, or wanted to have a witness to the agreement. The stranger did not answer. He merely smiled, a quick, feeble smile which conveyed a sort of bitterness over the suspicion that anyone could ascribe other desires to him than those connected with hunger and thirst.

"Let's go," Emma Antonsson commanded.

The stranger's head crawled down in the upturned coat collar as far as it could go, and the man followed her out into the pouring rain. He kept half a step back of her. Over his whole person there was something of a lost, hungry, and dripping wet dog which suddenly hears a kind word, and follows. . . .

II

He had been lying on her sofa, now, for over six weeks, at night.

Strictly speaking she had nothing to complain of. He was a very quiet young man, was Theodore, very willing and kind in every way. For a hungry unemployed he had unusually regular habits. He was up before her, in the morning, dressed himself and washed, made fire in the stove, went down in the courtyard to get water, while she got out of bed and made her humble toilette and locked the door as she went to work. And when at a quarter after five she again tramped up the two flights of stairs to her room she would find him either waiting outside the door or sitting on the top step. Then, without her asking him, he would pick up the pail to get water, light the lantern and go down in the wood bin to chop the wood for the next day.

All these little chores which lightened her work in a very great degree, he had assumed of his own accord, from the very first day, although she had not, by either word or thought, inferred that he ought to do something in return for his lodgings on the sofa. To begin with she thought: "So you're the sort of fellow who tries to ingratiate himself with the ladies to lead an easy life! In a couple of days you'll be asking me for the loan of twenty-five cents, and before long you'll ask for a crown. But that business won't go here. I'm too old to be taken in by such stuff." And she laughed to herself at the thought of her own shrewdness.

But after a couple of weeks she had to give up this idea. Several days passed and she didn't know what to think about Theodore, he was so different from what experience and hearsay had taught her that men were, as a rule. He remained just as unselfishly helpful, as quiet and introspective and he never asked for even the slightest penny. It was only little by little that a light dawned on her. If he was so different from everybody else, if he knew how to remain in his place and attend to the work so well, it was because he was a sailor and not a factory worker. She noticed it in many other things, too. He had only one change of underclothes, for instance, which had been dirty and full of holes when he arrived. But he was astonishingly clever in mending them and keeping them clean. He washed his shirt and his drawers every Saturday and it was a joy to see the way he mended his stockings every Sunday

morning after they had been drying, over the stove, during the night. And the fact that he could sit absolutely still for half an hour at a time, bent slightly forward and staring out ahead of him, or down at the floor, his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, this, too, was explained by his being a sailor.

Nor did she have anything to complain of, in regard to his temperance. Not even once had it happened, when he came home in the evening, that his breath smelled of brandy as he moved near her. Once in a while, in the evening, he would take a cigarette out of his pocket and light it. This was the only vice she had discovered in him. And then his passion for coffee.

She had never offered him a meal. Just why she could not say. Probably because in her blood lay the consciousness of many generations past, that a man must get his own food and not ask a woman for it. How he kept body and soul together during his fruitless search for work she did not know and she did not ask. Perhaps way down in her heart, unbeknownst even to herself, was a voice which whispered that she didn't want to know. In speaking of food she had limited herself to referring, in a casual way, to some kind people in town, saying where they lived, and apparently he had taken the hint for it happened sometimes in the evening that he put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a package of cold relishes. And, undoubtedly, every now and then he would get a job which brought him a little something, for he would get a shave, and then there were, of course, the cigarettes.

But coffee wasn't food and it seemed to her that she could offer him coffee without leading him into bad habits or lowering him in his own eyes. And besides she understood his passion for it better; it was her own.

While she had nothing direct to complain of in his behaviour, therefore, she nevertheless often felt annoyed and embarrassed at having him stay with her. There were several irritating details. The fact of having to undress in the dark, at night, for instance. Of course she had often thought of buying a screen; you could get one in a second-hand shop for almost nothing. But the mere thought in-

censed her. It was as if the screen would separate them and change their relationship entirely. She couldn't exactly explain why, but the mere thought of the screen gave her such an unpleasant feeling that she preferred the discomfort of undressing in the dark.

And then there were her fellow-workers, in the factory, both men and women, particularly the latter. They teased her a lot about him. "Look at her, old paragon of virtue! Once the devil gets in them you can't tell where they'll end!" It wasn't that she couldn't answer back, or that she didn't have a clear conscience, but it couldn't be denied that she often wished she could get rid of him. The only thing was how to go about it. That he had no prospects of getting work was all too evident. A place in a factory was not to be thought of. And out in the country there was nothing to do, either, for crowds kept pouring into the city from the fields like packs of wolves, in the hope of finding an opening in the factory town. And as for the sea, great heavens!—for months and months rows upon rows of boats had been lying idle along the quays in the harbour while one shipbroker after another who a few years ago had been rolling in wealth now had only his bare hands left. And besides they were in December, now. You couldn't put a poor devil out into the street at this time of the year, even if it *was* unpleasant to undress in the dark, night after night.

If anyone had told Emma Antonsson that she would feel a gnawing unrest in her heart when he, one day, would come and tell her that he was going, she would have dismissed the idea with scorn.

III

And yet that day and that hour came.

One night, in the middle of December, as he sat, as usual, bent forward, staring down on the floor in front of him, he said, suddenly:

"Listen, Emma. I've been thinking it over. I guess I'd better enlist in the navy."

She was sitting by the table darning stockings in the light of the kitchen lamp.

"Do you think so, Theodore?"

"Yes. By God, I don't like the idea. (It was the first time she had heard him swear.) But what can a fellow do? They say times won't get any better. And the Crown pays. . . . I'll have to do my military service anyway, so I might as well enlist now, for three years. I think that's what I've heard them say. By that time things will be picking up, on the sea. I don't know when they start recruiting, but I'm going to find out, if you'll let me stay till . . ."

"Of course, Theodore, since you've stayed so long you may as well stay a few days more."

She didn't mean to blame him for not having left sooner, she simply answered the last words in another's remark as people often do, even if the words have no bearing on the main subject. But in this case there was a deeper reason for her not wanting to enter into a discussion on the main subject, that of enlisting. The words *army*, *navy* and *recruiting* always made her see red with her whole being's inmost eye. Strictly speaking there was no conscious "anti-militarism" or any objection to preparedness back of her hatred. Socialistic theories about the proletariat's internationalism merely clung to her as clothes hang on a body of flesh and blood. For she had seen . . . year after year she had seen, in the factory, what *army* and *military training* meant: young mothers with infants, plunged into want and misery, when the Crown demanded that the father do his military service; old, worn-out mothers obliged to go back to work again, as their only support failed them. These yearly sights constituted the heart and brains, the nerves and muscles of her hatred to militarism. And the party's theories simply suited this body like an all-too-well-cut uniform.

It was therefore some time before she replied, rather evasively:

"But you don't have to enlist at once, Theodore. Why don't you wait till after Christmas? Sometimes things pick up, in the factories, after New Year. And then you won't have to go and enlist."

Women like Emma Antonsson know what reality is, unless they are so old that they have renounced all idea of happiness in this world and transported it into a world to

come. And they look reality square in the face. It didn't take Emma Antonsson many days to realise that it was not only hatred for the army and navy and military training which had made her suggest that he put off making a decision until after Christmas. A restless feeling came over her, a feeling she had experienced often before, for other men, and which she thought had died in her, long ago. And now, when its days were numbered, now that he was going to leave the little room, it came back again. Perhaps it wasn't as strong as in olden days, and perhaps it wouldn't take much effort to stifle it, but the mere fact that it was there, and that it was the last time in her life that she would experience it—all this resulted in her no longer pushing it away from her, but welcoming it, wrapping herself up in it, and clinging to it as one sits and clings to the sun's last rays, in the fall.

And sometimes it happened that a smile passed over her features, while she said to herself:

"And to think that I'm not too old for such ideas! . . ."

And when her fellow-workers in the factory now teased her about her lodger she no longer knew how to answer back, sharply, and she ended up by lying: she said she had put him out.

She bought a screen in the second-hand shop and put it up in front of her bed. For that matter it was absolutely unnecessary now. She had told him to come home later and to sneak up the stairs when no one saw him. She had also given him a key to the room, so she did not have to get up and open the door for him, as she lay in the dark, waiting to hear his muffled steps as he walked in his stocking feet, in the hall.

She lay and wondered what kept him out so late, what he did, and if he had any other friends. She couldn't go to sleep before she heard him undress. And even after that she often lay awake a long time. He was no longer the pitiful and more or less cumbersome unemployed, crushed by social iniquity: he had become a secret force which, in the dark, filled the little room with tension and drove sleep away. Only when she heard his heavy, regular breathing and she knew that he had fallen asleep, could she sleep. But even

then her slumber was light. If he merely turned or—as he often did—sighed in his sleep as if weighed down by the suffering he had gone through, she would wake up with a shiver and peer out into the dark, waiting for the tension in the room to receive a solution, waiting for something to happen. . . .

IV

And then Christmas Eve came.

It fell on a Sunday, that year. She had set the table with candles and had brought home some delicatessen, cold meat, red beets, two pigs' feet, a few slices of ham, a couple of bottles of Christmas brew and as a present for him, a package of cigarettes and a mouthpiece. A few days before he had had a little extra job carrying Christmas trees and people's generosity had apparently made the job a profitable one, for the night before Christmas he came home with a package of new underclothes, a stiff collar and a tie.

But there was no Christmas feeling. And yet he had never talked so much as that night. About other Christmases he had had. His father had been a sailor, like himself, that is to say, not a real sailor, but a carpenter on board ship, and he went off on long expeditions and most Christmases he had been away. He tried to explain as well as he could the feeling they had at home, on Christmas Eve. It was as if the mother sat all the time harking, peering into the dark, for a sound, a greeting. If the weather was bad she would shiver every time the storm rattled the windows and she would lean anxiously against the panes. She did not need to say anything, the children knew what she was thinking of and sometimes they would try to comfort her by saying that perhaps the weather wasn't so bad where he was. But she would only shake her head. All the years she had been married she had never been able to get used to the idea that the weather wasn't the same in the part of the world where he might be, as in her own town. And then they did not hear from him for a long time. And then came the news from the consulate general in London. The tackle had come tumbling down and hit him in the head, and he was dead. It happened in Halifax.

"And that broke my mother. She was never quite herself again, after that. She sort of lost her mind. There were some letters which she had written him and which she knew he always carried with him, in his kit-box, and she wanted them back, and when she didn't get them she sort of lost her mind. They were letters she had written during all the years they had been married. And a few years after she died."

And then there were the Christmases he had celebrated on sea, or in some port. If on board, the old man—Emma knew what he meant—the captain, that is, always read something from the Bible. You can't help it, on sea you get a touch of religion, somehow, sooner or later. My father was that way, and my mother, too, for that matter. They had both grown up in a God-fearing home—not religious in the sense that they sang psalms from morning till night and spoke of imitating Jesus, but religious in the sense that they thought of one thing and another and knew that death comes, all of a sudden, when one least suspects it. Like my father: to lie and get killed in port, a sober, decent fellow, who never tasted a drop of strong liquor after he married my mother. Although, come to think of it, it was sort of right for a carpenter to die from tackle falling on him, and not like a real sailor, at sea.

Emma sat and listened to him. She scarcely heard what he said, she only sat and was surprised at the life she tried to penetrate and which was so entirely different from the life she had known at the factory. She understood better, now, his quiet ways and his sense of order. And at the same time he became more distant and fascinating than before: it was as though he had become older because his experiences of life had been so totally different from hers. When did a factory worker of his age speak of death or realise that there were different ways of being religious? Not even she herself had done that. In her thoughts she sat and looked up at him. He knew a great deal, for his age. He had seen foreign lands, and he had thought about God and death. . . .

"And I myself," he said, "I was to have saved money to study for first officer, and then I would have gone to sea and

saved up some more and studied for captain. But here I go day after day, getting thinner and more stupid all the time, till I want to send everything to hell, and enlist . . .”

“But if you wait a little, Theodore, times may get better.”

He only shrugged his shoulders:

“This can’t go on any longer. I’m not the man to hang around here any more. You see it isn’t as if I didn’t want to work. But what can you do when your job stops?”

“You don’t think I’d put you out, do you?”

“It isn’t that . . .”

Emma did not dare look at him. She felt an oppressive tugging at her heart and she understood why he wanted to go, and more than ever she would have liked to keep him there, if she had only known how to go about it.

They went to bed early. She lay in the darkness, unable to sleep. Suddenly she started. What was that? What ailed him? It sounded as if he were crying. She raised herself slowly upon one elbow and listened intently. Yes, he was crying. Her heart beat wildly. But she did not dare move. She lay listening to him cry, heard the sniveling he tried to hide, and wished she could do something for him. At last the sniveling broke out into heartbreaking sobs and all at once she was out of bed, and found her way to the sofa. She caught his head, fell down by his side, saying things she scarcely understood and which she scarcely knew were in her.

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In the daytime neither referred to what had happened.

She saw by his evasive eyes that he despised himself and her. But with the darkness her courage came back. This was her last, her very last love—or whatever sensible people called it—her very, very last. And after it would come old age, nothing but the factory and old age. In the darkness she did not care that he despised her, she did not care about anything beyond knowing how his scorn broke down, melted; there was a bitter triumph in this, and in the thought that back of what was now going on lay the death he talked about, the death which is called old age.

In this way she kept him there till the middle of February. Then one evening he told her he had enlisted and was leaving for Karlskrona the following day. He told her about it in his same quiet manner. There was no sorrow at parting, rather, perhaps, relief at being free.

"And so you're going, Theodore."

That was all she said. She had known, for a little over a week, that she was going to be a mother. But she did not say anything about it. What was to be said? She looked reality in the face. She had nothing to ask of him, not even his name. What could anyone ask of a nineteen-year-old boy? That would only make all that had happened so ridiculous, so ugly, or whatever one would call it. And then there was something else that she had been thinking of, these last days. She felt that the child that was to come into the world would be her own, hers only, and no one else's in the world. If she could only keep silent. She didn't need any father for it, she did not have to give any name. She need only tell the minister she didn't know who the man was. The child was hers, only hers, no one else's in the world.

She had thought it all over, she had thought everything out, these last days. It would be hard, yes, just before it came into the world. She would meet with sneers and taunts and coarse jokes, when she would no longer be able to hide what had happened. But it would have to be. People forget.

And after it was born and she would be well enough to go back to the factory, she would put the child in the nursery in the morning, and in the evening she would get it and wrap it up in a gray blanket, as she had seen so many of the younger women do. All night she would have it to herself, it would lie at her bosom, she would feel its warmth, she would hear it breathe, she would. . . . She would no longer be lonely. And it would grow up and go to school, and in sixteen years or so, when she would be too old to go to the factory, it would begin where she left off.

She looked up at Theodore.

"So you've enlisted."

He nodded his head in reply, as if he were afraid, by a word, to start a discussion.

And then everything was silent again.

THE PEACH GARDEN

By RESIK HALID

THE road leading to the river, after leaving the town, passed through innumerable orchards of peach trees. The shady meadows were kept moist even in the hottest weather by the overflow of the brooks, and the grass started a second growth towards the end of summer. While the hot sun ripened the fruit on the trees, an enduring green covered the earth and the meadows extended on both sides of the road. The cool waters and the perfume of the ever young grass gave an irresistible charm to these gardens where, in its setting of pleasing and shady abundance, spring tarried till the beginning of autumn.

In hot weather, when the sun beat down fiercely on the little town, all who could get away from their work came for a rest on the meadows after taking a bath in the river.

The peaches on the topmost branches, admirably ripe, fell onto the grass where the idlers rested. The place was replete with fruit, partly on the trees, partly on the ground.

In the town the children playing in the streets were rowdy up to the setting of the sun and the nostrils were assailed by the stench of the midden heaps, so that these orchards offered a welcome retreat. With the first waft of afternoon coolness, the officials of the local public bodies used to mount their donkeys, carefully place the bottles of spirits in the saddle-bags and ride along to the peach gardens.

When the setting sun was caressing with its last rays the branches groaning under their load of fruit, alfresco diners would sit in groups on the turf. They laughed and joked while sipping their brandy; they recited verse; to some vigorous voice intoning one of Medine's poems would answer the dulcet, sad tones of a lyre. Throughout the whole district the peach gardens were famed. They were the universal topic of conversation. For this reason the small

town, that was privileged by nature to be situated in close proximity to them, had become the favourite resort of certain public officials whose activities were mainly governed by their care for pleasure and enjoyment. The place, whose Sous-Prefets had ever been libertines and Kadis voluptuous livers, had in time adapted itself to the loose ways of its rulers. Peasants and dwellers in small towns are peculiarly susceptible to ideas imposed on them from above; so they had not escaped the influence of this soft, easy manner of living.

The place was, therefore, marked out from all others by the looseness of its morals. Actions and ways of life that would have been tolerated nowhere else called for no comment here. For once, the bureaucrats had been at pains to introduce some change in the habits of the people, and they had unfortunately been only too successful.

The peach gardens were the "Sweet Waters" of Anatolia and in many respects bore an aspect similar to that presented some years ago by the notorious playing ground of Constantinople. Music was incessant here, and the noise of dancers' cymbals mingled with that of the band.

Among the dissolute Sous-Prefets and Kadis were some who had real talent for poetry and wrote verse after the fashion of the great poet, Medine.

During their long sittings, while drinking spirits and eating *mazzes*, they employed the intervals between the music in discoursing about rhythm, mysticism and questions touching the beliefs of the various orders of dervishes.

Being careful to avoid any activity that might entail either reward or censure, these officials, lovers of pleasure and ease, remained for long periods at their posts. They had established themselves permanently in the little town, had got themselves houses built, surrounded by pleasant gardens. They had no ambition, they expected no advancement in their professions, so they attended but ill to public affairs and devoted all their thoughts to amusement.

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It was on a summer's day and a heavy heat was spread over the town. Aghiah Bey, the new Secretary of the Pre-

lecture, who that very morning had entered his functions, was considerably surprised to learn that the oncoming afternoon coolness entailed the immediate emptying of the office. The officials made their way to the courtyard, where their asses were tethered, and rode off out of the town, filling the air with their jokes and pleasantries. One could see the entire caravan jogging along merrily towards the shady trees of the peach gardens. The new secretary was a man who had imbibed all sorts of theories without ever acquiring any sense of realities. After his course of studies in the Ecole Supérieure de l' Administration, he had found the air of Constantinople—where Abdul Hamid's despotic rule was more pronounced than anywhere else—so oppressive that he had fled to France. But this escapade did not last long. Some powerful personage intervened and Aghiah Bey returned to Turkey. He was cast for a few months into the Central Prison, when it was decided to exile him to Anatolia by nominating him as secretary in this little lost town, far away from the capital.

On the way to his new post, Aghiah Bey had had occasion to stop for the night at several old *hans*, utterly comfortless, in impoverished villages, where there was no trace of any beneficent or reforming government. His heart had filled with sorrow at the sight and had inspired him with a resolve to devote himself wholeheartedly to his administrative duties.

On reaching the little town, his head was full of plans formed during the journey. He was convinced he could do a great work. He would astonish his colleagues by the creative and administrative energy he would display. He would give himself no single moment of rest, but would labour unceasingly with ever-increasing fervour. He was of opinion that all that was required was courage. Not for an instant did he doubt the result of his efforts, but was, on the contrary, convinced that he would draw into the vortex of his activity all the officials of the place, from the Prefet himself to the last of the ushers.

He could not understand this laziness, this stagnation he found here. Aghiah Bey had made up his mind to be a modern official, imbued with western ideas altogether dif-

ferent from those which reigned in his present surroundings. Was this small post that had been entrusted to him not an opportunity for him to show his worth?

From the very first day, he felt his programme would not be put through without a hard fight. The Sous-Prefet had insisted on the small amount of work there was to do and had advised him to take things very easy. The Kadi, in the interval between two quotations from the poet Yahya, reminded him of the sweets of love and discoursed on the necessity for large mindedness in the business of life. . . .

The head cashier had led the conversation, frequently interrupted by his loud bursts of laughter, round to some marvelous liqueur of peaches, twenty-two degrees in strength, which he manufactured himself with extraordinary care. The "Evkaf" man had gone even further than his colleague: learning that the newcomer was unmarried, he had put his hand familiarly on his shoulder and comfortingly remarked he need have no fear, he would be well provided for on that score. . . .

The Chief of the Gendarmerie, a decrepit old man, had greeted him nonchalantly and talked perfectly irrelevantly about the Haman, the dome of which rose above the market place.

Aghiah Bey was astounded. He refused bluntly the invitation of the head cashier, who wanted to take him along to the peach gardens. But, at this early hour in the afternoon, the new secretary remained alone in the office. A little later, weary of solitude, he went out for a walk through the streets of the little town. They were deserted; everybody was in the fields. He saw no one but a few persons going to the well and some old women whose age debarred them from participation in the pleasures of youth.

The sun had sunk beyond the horizon. The few feeble lights that had sprung up in the windows after evening prayer had now gone out and thick darkness reigned.

Aghiah Bey had gone to bed early. But after a short sleep he was wakened by the merry cries of his returning colleagues. From afar one could discern the noise of the lagers behind, whipping their donkeys into a trot to catch up with the rest.

The new secretary could not repress an angry exclamation. Pleasure seemed to have drawn these men into a moving sand in which they had sunk in softness and negligence. They cared nothing at all for the rest of the world.

Profoundly disgusted by this slackness that was common to all his colleagues, Aghiah Bey resolved to be yet more serious and resolute on the morrow and to treat with firmness these people of feeble and materialistic soul.

He fell asleep once more, an expression of great determination on his quiet face.

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The new secretary was profoundly bored in this little town that gave the impression every day of being plunged in the disorder of a marriage feast. He had imagined in the beginning that his duties would leave him but little time for boredom, but he had next to nothing to do, and most of his time was spent in yawning. He had been unable to follow up the plans he had formed within a few days of his arrival for the rebuilding of the town and the reforming of the kind of agricultural implements used by the peasantry. He had ever sought to bring the conversation round to progress, civilisation, the urgent necessity for introducing new methods into the country; he had made eloquent speeches, full of bitter, stern warnings, but he met among all his colleagues an intangible indifference which they did not even out of politeness try to conceal.

Aghiah Bey had lived through moments of infinite sadness. The inadequacy of public funds and the laziness of public officials were insuperable obstacles to the march of progress.

Besides which, the craving for work that had consumed him was beginning to wear off. An unbearable existence had opened. His colleagues no longer treated him with the respect they had shown him on his arrival. They had no use for this strange individual, who had up till now refused all their tempting offers. What a contrast with his predecessor!

They thought of him with affection. The young fellow from Smyrna had made an almost sensational entry. On

the very day of his arrival, they had invited him to a feast, where, after getting drunk on brandy, he had danced like a professional *artiste*, for hours on end, before a lot of people he was seeing for the first time in his life. The motions of his body were fitted with perfect art to the swing of the tunes popular at the moment; he had won universal sympathy and applause. The next day he had capped his artistic triumph by a literary exhibition and composed a long poem on the preceding evening. This poetic achievement had earned for him the congratulations of the Sous-Prefet who, kissing his eyes, had told him: "My dear fellow, you are the modern Fouzouli!"

The new secretary found no pleasure either in amorous song nor in the intoxication of brandy. This lamentable deficiency caused him to disturb the harmony which, inspired by love of pleasure, the other officials had so admirably established among themselves. Throughout the two months he had been there, they had been unable to persuade him to as much as pay a single visit to the peach gardens. The head cashier might praise his twenty-two-degree peach liqueur, the clerk might sing the beauty of the daughters of Eve he received in his quarters nightly through the tiny doorway giving on to the deserted streets. Nothing moved him.

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One day the head cashier was even more persistent than usual in his invitation and insisted that if Aghiah Bey refused it, he would be very angry indeed. Some of the other officials joined in with him. They promised Aghiah Bey that proceedings would be restricted to the strictest privacy; the number of guests would not exceed four or five; the kadi, the director of the post office, the "Evkaf" official and one or two other functionaries. That was all. Above all, in order to suit the new secretary, it had been resolved to break up the party early.

Aghiah Bey feared to offend his colleagues unduly and ended by yielding to their entreaties. Besides, he was tremendously bored in the afternoons, being all alone in the office. At bottom, he was not particularly sorry to visit

these gardens for once. After all, was it not childish to remain so long adamant to the beauties of nature?

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It was on the fated afternoon. They were mounted on donkeys covered with velvet saddle rugs, swift footed and lively. Aghiah Bey was pleasantly tickled by this ride.

They had now left the dusty road that bordered on the town and were making their way under the trees whose heavy foliage surrounded the peach gardens. The scent of the fruit trees soothed the young secretary's nerves. He directed strange, hungry looks at the maidens who laughed and leaped on the sward and picked the fruit. A little farther on he met women bearing bundles of linen whose faces had after bathing acquired a fascinating freshness of complexion. They were well built, with large haunches, and followed the secretary with such tender yet passionate eyes that he felt his heart beating wildly.

The head cashier was in love with his own peach brandy. He tendered timidly a glass of it to Aghiah Bey, saying: "Do try it for once. You will tell me how you like it."

It was a strange-tasting liqueur, a trifle sharp, with the flavour of peaches. Aghiah Bey did not find it unpleasant and for a while he sipped one after the other the little glasses the head cashier was emboldened to offer him.

They had set up their table in one of the pleasantest corners of the gardens. The younger clerks, who had followed their superiors, were actively engaged in preparing the *hors d'œuvres* that were to be consumed with the liqueur. The ushers were toasting small lumps of aromatised meat at an open fire and the air was pleasantly redolent of the smell of roasted flesh that tickled agreeably the nostrils of the guests. They drank copiously and relished with insatiable appetites the viands prepared by their junior colleagues.

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Despite their promises to Aghiah Bey, they showed no haste to leave the gardens. When they set out on the return journey, the moon was rising beyond the hills from

behind the darkness that screened the sky, as if eager to light so joyous a company on its way.

A moving, graceful voice was intoning some verses of the great poet, Fouzouli, in which the Bagdad bard sang of the woes of love. The merrymakers on their donkeys were advancing at a quick pace but had been suddenly stricken with silence, for one and all they were meditating on love. From time to time a deep sigh accompanied the young singer who, with warm and taking voice, was confiding the poet's complaint to the infinite depths of the summer's night.

Aghiah Bey was well nigh drunk. They were taking him home. He undressed rapidly and went to bed. His whole body reacted to a pleasant tiredness that had little in common with the weariness of preceding days, and he was soon sunk in deep sleep.

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The morrow was a holiday. His colleagues had notified him of their intention to bathe in the river and lunch at the mill near the peach gardens. In the evening, they would take their *apéritif* at the Sous-Prefet's by the side of the lake he had had dug in his garden. At first Aghiah Bey would not accept this invitation. But what was he to do alone in this wretched little town, so dusty, so full of that eternal stench of midden? Besides, since his arrival he had never been the length of the river.

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Quite early they set out on their donkeys riverwards. The secretary's colleagues got into the water. Aghiah Bey had intended merely watching his friends steeping their bodies in the cool stream, but he reflected that contact with the cold water would be refreshing to his body, somewhat tired as it was after the previous night's exertions.

An hour later they were out of the water. Aghiah Bey felt wonderfully better after his cooling bath and was inhaling vigourously the scented air that was wafted from the peach gardens.

Arrived at the mill, the officials found the roast mutton they had ordered in the early morning. They ate so much that they felt an irresistible desire to rest after the meal.

The party at the Sous-Prefet's turned out to be more refined and elegant than that of the previous evening in the peach garden. Brandy was served out of bottles and drunk out of crystal glasses. The *hors d'œuvres*, inseparable accompaniment of such bibulous evenings, were more *recherché*, and among them some specialties were to be found that were rarities in that lost corner of Anatolia.

A cashier from a neighbouring district, who was on leave, played the violin; a civil service official imitated the dialect of the merchants congregated in the street of the capital on a fair day, to the vast amusement of the company.

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Aghiah Bey had begun to attend all the appointments, all the evenings. His friends invited him to purchase a donkey, an indispensable adjunct to their manner of living. After a few days' search in the neighbouring villages, they ended by finding him a strong, sure-footed animal. Every evening, saddle-covered with a horse cloth its master had got specially made, it would wait with the other donkeys in the yard of the Sous-Prefets, for the secretary to ride to the appointed rendezvous.

For a long time now, schemes of reorganization have been neglected. No longer does Aghiah Bey make impassioned speeches on the reforms desirable in the country's interest. Besides, he no longer finds time for work; invitations, parties take him up so fully.

With the month of August began the shooting season. One got up early of a morning to shoot partridges in the adjoining vineyards. The little town seemed to have no further business than to serve the good pleasure of their lordships. The gendarmes journeyed to distant villages to fetch good dogs. The coursing hounds were being engaged already for the winter hunting.

The old president of the criminal court took malicious delight in teasing the secretary. The ancient *roué* who, out of some mysterious affectation, used to sip his brandy from

small coffee cups, said frequently to Aghiah Bey: "Young man, in this country one can live a long time without a wife. Do the best you can for yourself."

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It was a dark night. The "Evkaf" official brought him in through the narrow door of his house into a low-roofed room. Two young women were smoking cigarettes and their free and easy manners showed they were used to the company of men. Brought early into contact with these voluptuous officials, these country girls had got their tongues well untied.

The one was a brunette, the other a blonde. They were elegant and attractive, and speedily conquered the new secretary.

Aghiah Bey found the evening at the "Evkaf" official's much pleasanter than he dared hope for. Taking his leave from his host, he was profuse in his thanks and said: "You were quite right, my dear fellow, they are exceedingly pretty . . ."

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Evening succeeded evening now without interruption. The officials were as gay in winter as in summer. Aghiah Bey had little by little contracted new habits. He would now have found it difficult to go without that famous brandy. Following the example of the head cashier he had bought implements necessary for its manufacture, and consumed nightly no small quantity of the drink.

Late at night, he frequently received the visit of gay ladies whose beauty had become notorious in the countryside.

As soon as he got home in the afternoons, he hastened to get rid of his town clothes and put on a comfortable *entari*. Then he would stretch himself out on the soft cushions of a room that looked out on the garden. He would smoke his *narghile* with an air of complete repose. His body seemed to expand and bloom on that soft, easy divan. Aghiah Bey now felt at ease only in his *entari*, and experienced no desire

to take part in official business. He went more and more seldom to the office and mostly spent his time playing at draughts with the kadi or at cards with the head cashier.

In this land of mild Mediterranean climate, winter was quite warm and pleasant. One feast succeeded another. The carefree, easy life he was leading had ended by stifling the last sparks of Aghiah Bey's energy. When his thoughts wandered back to his schemes and his speeches, a fugitive smile would appear on his lips while smoking his *narghile*. Seeking an excuse to himself, he would mutter: "Ah, well, it was just inexperience, lack of a sense of realities . . ."

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One whole year had rolled by.

The sun was flooding the green countryside with ardent light. A warm wind was wafting the scent of the peach gardens over the little town and penetrated through the window into Aghiah Bey's room. It was luring him back into the peach gardens.

Last year, at this time, clad in his frock coat, Aghiah Bey had held forth vigourously against laziness and slackness; now he hid his fattening body in the folds of a long *entari*, stretched himself out sensuously on the downy cushions of his room, saying:

"Great God, how sweet, how delicious is this life . . ."

THE GREY DONKEY

By RESIK HALID

THE children who had gone to fetch some water from the river came back stating that they had seen a man lying in the narrow road leading to the mountain. A grey donkey, they said, was wandering loose near by.

Husmène Hodja, the *mouhtar* (mayor) of the village, on hearing the news, asked two of the villagers to go with him to the place referred to by the children.

It was approaching evening. A strong odour and a thick mist, rising from the rice fields, was spreading over the wet, marshy ground at the confluence of the two small rivers. The declining sun, through some ancient willows, threw here and there pale gleams on the still waters that bordered the fields. These little patches, feebly lighted by the setting sun, resembled, in the midst of that vast and watery plain, the little rifts in a cloudy and gloomy sky that one after another were extinguished and covered over.

The three villagers slowly mounted, one after another, the narrow road that overhung two deep ravines and led to the mountain. They did not talk between themselves. The subdued sound of their footsteps was mingled from time to time with the bark of a dry cough which by fits and starts shook the entire frame of one of them.

The first thing they saw was the grey donkey, down there among the bush. He had discovered a very dusty place, where he had lain down, no doubt after having for a long time stamped upon the soil. Now, with a tranquil and impassible air, he gazed at the sun which was disappearing below the horizon.

Husmène Hodja called out, "Where are you, wayfarer?" A little further on an old and feeble man, lying with his back against an old and sapless trunk, panted continuously and, looking with sightless eyes in the direction of those

who were approaching him, gesticulated and pointed to his chest. To the questions that were put to him he responded only by incomprehensible murmurs, in a voice that had no strength but was more like a profound sigh.

The villagers, thinking for a moment that he was about to die, bent over him and waited. The suffering man recovered his senses, however, and began to feel better.

He was an old man of poor appearance, clad in a long, pale-blue robe, and wearing a dark-coloured ribbon round his fez. Those parts of his face that were not concealed under a thick white beard were covered with wrinkles that had been burned by the sun of the torrid plains. Under his swollen and drooping eyelids were hidden two shining little eyes, so pale as to be almost white, which rested on men and things with the look of a child.

The face that a moment before had been so ghastly, little by little assumed a healthier tint, and life came back to the sightless eyes. The sick man, still supporting himself against the tree, let fall a few words in a dying voice and stated that he had come from a very distant land and that he was bound for a region beyond the seas and the mountains.

On the proposal of Husmène Hodja that the stranger should be taken to the guest house, the villagers helped the sick man to get up on his grey donkey and, holding him on each side so that he should not fall, they painfully descended the road, pushing out of the way with their feet the clods of earth that lay along each side of the road.

The sun had now set and the still waters in the river beds had lost their last gleams of light. The jagged and perpendicular mountains that surrounded the village had long since drowsed off to sleep, resting one against the other their cloud and fog-covered heads.

The village, buried in the deep shadows of the rocks that rose around it, was plunged in profound silence. Not a light was to be seen at the windows, not a voice was heard on the road.

The noise caused by the arrival of the three peasants, who had now reached the entrance to the village, attracted the attention of some of the villagers, who put their heads out

of the doorways of their houses and gazed at the three shadows, moving by the side of the weary donkey.

The three men made their way towards the room reserved for the rare guests whose path led them to the village. Husmène Hodja, advancing from behind the grey donkey, began to call out: "Where are you all? Come and see the visitor who has arrived!"

The doors of the houses now opened, and the peasants, clad in dyed-linen drawers and holding flaming torches, led the way towards the village guest house.

The village itself, which was situated at a distance of two days' journey from the chief town of the district and remote from any kind of practicable road, was one of the poorest in Anatolia. Travellers who were going on foot from the principal center in one district to that of the next, passed through this village at times when, in consequence of drought, the Kizil-Irmak was fordable, and were thus able to save forty-eight hours of time. It was in these circumstances alone that, during the course of a year, a dozen or so of poor people came into this lost village of the plain, during the melancholy hours at the close of the day, to ask for hospitality for the night.

In accordance with custom, Husmène Hodja, the *mouhtar* of the village, while conducting this unknown traveller to the guest house, where the fire composed of pine trunks remained always alight, winter and summer alike, summoned those of the villagers to whom on this particular day fell the task of caring for and furnishing food to the visitor.

The sick man was now calmer. In his enfeebled voice he told how he had been attacked by an affection of the chest which, when his malady was at the worst, gave him no respite.

A two-handled copper pot, which had entirely lost its colour through long usage, now hung over the blazing fire, and an agreeable smell of fresh milk filled this room with the low ceiling and the tiny windows. The sick man drank with evident pleasure, from a copper cup—equally blackened—the milk that was offered to him.

Soon afterwards, a persistent attack of hiccoughs seized

him. After each hiccough which shook his frame, he ejaculated piously, "May God be blessed!"

The villagers, seated on their bended knees, filled the room and waited with impatience for an opportunity to enter into conversation with the visitor that chance had sent them. The children remained standing near the door, gazing with sleepy eyes at this sick stranger, in whom they found nothing at all alluring.

The attack of hiccoughs grew stronger. The sick man drew nearer to the point of death, and with trembling hands he beckoned to the villagers to come closer to him. Husmène Hodja, followed by some of the oldest men, surrounded the dying man. The children, become curious, did not, however, dare cross the threshold of the room.

The dying man spoke in low tones and with great difficulty. He gave the impression that he wished to make his will. Husmène Hodja nodded his head in sign of approval, but said, from time to time, "Don't trouble about that! Rest tranquil, we will look after him!"

A few minutes afterwards the sick man breathed his last. The villagers prostrated themselves for some minutes, and then left the death chamber, leaving behind them the dead man whose visit had been so brief.

The sick man had been able to make his last wishes understood. He bequeathed the eight Turkish pounds which he carried in his belt, as well as his grey donkey, to the city of Mecca.

On returning from the burial ground the villagers gathered before the mosque, for the purpose of discussing the best means of carrying out the wish that the old man had expressed before his death. The result of their deliberations was nil. Ultimately they decided to send Husmène Hodja to the chief town of the district, to confer with the Cadi on the subject.

The grey donkey had now acquired an entirely exceptional importance. He was fed abundantly. He was brought out regularly at a fixed hour and taken to the drinking trough, and everything in connection with him was carried out with pious attention, as if it were a sacred duty.

From time to time one villager would ask another anxiously: "Has anybody fed the grey donkey? Has he been taken out to drink?"

One morning, at the first signs of daybreak, the villagers accompanied Husmène Hodja as far as the mill situated at the limits of the village. The *mouhtar*, mounted on a smaller ass, held the grey donkey on a rope. A few days' complete rest had done him all the good in the world and, free from any kind of burden, he trotted along merrily behind Husmène Hodja, capering and leaping with pure joy of life.

It was a long and weary journey!

The rice stalks rising from amid the standing water had barely been left behind and the scanty shadows of the reeds lost sight of than the little cavalcade entered upon a dusty track. For two long days the route lay through bare and naked land, without a hamlet, a tiny mill or a tree or two that might give a shady shelter to the traveller suffocating under a pitiless sun. There was only a single ancient *han*, or rustic inn, which Husmène Hodja planned to reach by the evening of the first day of his journey.

The *mouhtar* reached the county seat just as the sun was preparing to set behind the mountains. After housing his own mount in the cheapest stable he could find, he installed the grey donkey in the best quarters the town afforded.

At an early hour on the following morning Husmène Hodja made his way to the town hall. It was a handsome building which, from its style, gave one the impression of a provincial casino. Its construction had never been completed, however, and here and there it was already beginning to show signs of decay. In more than one place there were large cracks, which served as nesting places for pigeons. The windows of the upper story had never been entirely finished, nor the walls plastered.

A sergeant of gendarmery, wearing no tunic and with unkempt hair, asked the early caller what he wanted.

In view of the importance of his mission, and wishing to give his story in full detail, Husmène Hodja began from the point where the village children had first seen the dying old man. He had not reached the middle of his narrative when

the sergeant, with a nonchalant air, wandered off to interview another *hodja* who was smoking his *narghile* under the awning of the principal café of the town, close by.

Husmène Hodja eventually learned that the Cadi had left for Constantinople on leave. The *mouhtar* then decided to lay the question before the sub-prefect, as the Cadi's deputy.

Leaving his shoes outside the door of the room occupied by the sub-prefect, Husmène Hodja, with his toes peeping out of his ragged and dirty stockings, advanced with a timid step and bent to half his height, towards the representative of local authority.

Neither the sub-prefect, however, had the patience to listen to the poor peasant's long-winded narrative to the end. A few minutes after it had begun, he called for the sergeant of gendarmery and ordered him to settle the matter.

The sergeant, however, had no wish to hear anything about the affair; nor would he take charge of the grey donkey, or allow Husmène Hodja to take it back with him to his village.

For five days the poor *mouhtar* hung about the town, recounting to everybody who would listen to him the object of his journey, but without arriving at any result whatever.

Eventually he was advised to return home and come back again in a fortnight, by which time it was expected the Cadi would have returned from Constantinople.

Husmène Hodja, followed by the grey donkey, took the fatiguing and monotonous road that he had already traversed in the reverse direction, and after two tiring days regained his village.

In the evening the villagers, in council assembled, were made acquainted with the fact that the *mouhtar's* journey had involved a good deal of expense. In the town barley had cost a good deal more than at home, and the grey donkey, which had all the time been well fed and looked after, had consumed no small quantity of it!

In view of the fact that the animal was destined for a holy place, however, the villagers willingly decided to stand the expense that had been incurred.

Husmène, on his part, breathed not a word of complaint in regard to the fatigue of his long journey. On the contrary, he felt that to undergo labour and toil in a sacred cause was for him a pleasure.

A second journey by Husmène Hodja had equally fruitless results. The sergeant of gendarmery to whom he addressed himself for the purpose of learning if the Cadi had returned, brutally dismissed him with the remark: "What a fool you are! Can't you have patience for another few days?"

Husmène Hodja returned a second time to his village, accompanied by the grey donkey, and without having solved the problem that was so important to himself and to the villagers.

When he returned from his third journey, however, he was able to say to the villagers who met him at the entrance to the village and asked him for explanations: "How stupid we have been not to have remembered that witnesses would be necessary for the purpose of settling such an important question!"

The villagers, delighted to realise that their efforts were soon to be crowned with success, looked at each other and confessed their astonishment that they should have overlooked such a simple thing. Since the Cadi had undertaken to send the grey donkey to Mecca, it was decided that on this fourth journey Husmène Hodja should be accompanied by three witnesses.

The grey donkey, which had been well fed for a couple of months, without having had the least weight put upon his back, had by this time become very fit. In the evenings, when he was taken out to drink, he frisked about like a kitten and gave every sign of being in tip-top condition as a result of the good care received.

All preparations for the final journey to the seat of the Cadi having been made, Husmène Hodja once more took the grey donkey by the bridle and, accompanied by the three peasants as witnesses, again set off from his village, and for the fourth time, under the rays of the rising sun, faced the monotony of his long and tiring journey.

The grey donkey, after the witnesses had given their

testimony under oath and the whole affair had been formally concluded, was left in the care of the Cadi.

* * * * *

When Husmène Hodja and his companions returned home, the villagers heard with the deepest satisfaction the statements of their *mouhtar* and his witnesses in regard to the proceedings that had taken place before the Cadi. They told how they had affixed seals to their testimony, and how they had taken an oath by placing their hands on the Holy Book. Now they were very sure that the animal which had given them so much trouble and had cost the village so much would go to Mecca without any difficulty and without having to submit to the least burden, and that he would always be well fed and well cared for. Down there he would have nothing to do except to carry the holy water.

Husmène Hodja even dreamed about the grey donkey, and told his friends that in his vision he had seen the beast bearing a green velvet saddle. . . .

The more simple of the villagers even claimed that they had seen the grey donkey, when in his stable in the evenings, solemnly moving his head like the dervishes at the moment when the latter are accustomed to offer up their evening prayers.

* * * * *

A year passed away and Husmène Hodja again found himself at the county seat, whither he had gone for the purpose of selling his rice crop. It was market day, and the main street had assumed, as usual, an aspect very different from the sleepy appearance it wore during the rest of the week. Peasants who had come in from the neighbouring villages, dealers who made it their business to go from town to town and display their brightly coloured piece goods and a hundred other kinds of goods in the market places, filled the narrow thoroughfares to such an extent that it was difficult to find room to pass.

Husmène Hodja was chatting with some other villagers when an arrogant shout suddenly broke upon their ears: "Stand back! Stand back! Let me pass!"

The poor *mouhtar*, on turning round, could not for a moment believe the evidence of his senses. Could it be possible? The man who shouted thus was the Cadi himself who, mounted on the grey donkey, was steadily forcing his way through the market people!

Husmène Hodja, rendered motionless with astonishment, at first thought he must be dreaming. There was no doubt about it, however: it was certainly the Cadi, and it was also, beyond all doubt, the grey donkey; and it was this man who, pushing his way through the little knots of peasants who were gathered here and there, continued to shout: "Stand back! Stand back! Let me pass!"

**THE YEARBOOK OF THE
CONTINENTAL SHORT STORY
JULY, 1923 TO JULY, 1924**

ADDRESSES OF MAGAZINES PUBLISHING SHORT STORIES

This address list does not aim to be complete, but it is based simply on the magazines which I have consulted for this volume, and which have not ceased publication.

Belgium

Annales (de la Société des amis du) Prince de Ligue, 118, Avenue de Visé, Bruxelles.
l'Aurore, 24, rue Frans Binjé, Bruxelles.
Bataille Littéraire (La), 477, Chaussée de Waterloo, Bruxelles.
Clairon Hardy (Le), 49, Avenue Albert, Bruxelles.
Défense Wallonne, 5, rue de l'Amazone, Bruxelles.
Femme Belge (La), 75, Boulevard Clovis, Bruxelles.
Flambeau (Le), 58-62, rue Coudenberg, Bruxelles.
Horizon (L'), 67, rue Royale, Bruxelles.
Ons Volk Ontwaakt, 127, Boulevard Emile Jacqmain, Bruxelles.
Renaissance d'Occident (La), 95, rue Berckmans, Bruxelles.
Revue d'Actions et d'Impressions, 33, rue d'Albanie, Bruxelles.
Revue Générale (La), 21, rue de la Limite, Bruxelles.
Thyrée et les Chants de l'Aube (Le), 104, Avenue de Montjoie, Bruxelles.

Bulgaria

Democraticheski Pregled, Sofia.
Listopad, Sofia.
Mosaïque de romans contemporains, Sofia.
Outrina, Sofia.
Slntze, Sofia.
Svobodno Mnemie, Sofia.
Vezni, Sofia.
Zlatorog, Sofia.

Czechoslovakia

Cesky Svet, Karlin, Královská, 46, Prague.
Cesta, Prague II Mariánska, 3.
Lumir, Prague Karlovo nám.
Moderní revue, T 203, Prague.
République Tchécoslovaque (La), Prague II Mariánska, 3.
Stesena, Prague Smichov Kralovska Trida 66.
Topicuv Sbornik literární a umělecký, Prague II Narodní tr. II.
Země, Prague Smichov, Tichá, 9.
Zensky Svet, Prague II Mariánska ul. 3.
Zvon, Prague Vysehrad.

Finland

Allas Krönika, Helsinki.
 Kotiliesi, Helsinki.
 Maailma, Hämeenlinna.
 Otavainen, Helsinki.
 Suomen Kuvalehti, Helsinki.
 Valvoja-Aika, Helsinki.
 Våra Kvinnor, Helsinki.

Germany

Berliner Leben, Berlin
 Die Dame, Berlin
 Die Gartenlaube, Munich
 Der Herr, Berlin
 Der Jungeselle, Nollendorf Platz, Berlin W 3
 Das Leben, Leipziger Verlag, Berlin
 Modenschrift für die Elegante Welt, Berlin
 Preussische Jahrbücher, Berlin
 Reigen, Berlin
 Sport-Leben, Berlin
 Suddeutsche Monatshefte, Munich
 Die Woche, Ullstein Verlag, Berlin

Greece

Argo, Athens
 Hesperon, Lyra
 Moussa, Athens
 Nea Vemoi, Athens
 Nea Zoi, Alexandria
 Le Noumas, Athens
 Revue Heptameron, Corfu
 Revue Littéraire, Samos.

Holland

Amsterdammer Weekblad, Kaisergracht 333, Amsterdam. *Abb*
 Amst. Weekbl.
 Beiaard.
 Buiten, Amsterdam.
 Diersche Warrande. D. War.
 Eigen Haard. Eig. Haard.
 Elsevier's Maandschrift, Amsterdam. *Elsev.*
 Getij.
 Gids (P. N. V. Kampen & Zoon), Amsterdam.
 Groot Nederland. GrNed.
 Gulden Winckel (Hollandia-Drukkerij), Baarn. Guld. Winckel.
 Kroniek.
 Leven en Werken.
 Mork's Maziyn. Morka.
 Nederland, Damrak 88, Amsterdam. *Ned.*
 Nieuwe Gids, s'Gravenhage. *NGids.*
 Onze Eeuw (De Erven F. Bohn) Haarlem. *OEeuw.*

Ons Eigen Tijdschrift. Ons eigen Tijdschr.
 Op de Hoogte, Klokhuysplein 5, Haarlem.
 Opgang.
 Socialistische Gids, Amsterdam. Soc Gids.
 Stem (Dirk Coster en Just Havelaar), Arnhem.
 Stemmen des Tijds. Stemm. d. Tijds.
 Vlaamsche Arbeid. Arbeid.

Hungary

Budapesti Hirlap, Rökk Shiard Utca 4, Budapest.
 Budapesti Szemli, Egyetem utca 4, Budapest.
 Nyngat, Budapest.
 Vaprelet, Dobrenker Utca 12, Budapest.
 Wok, Andrassy Utca 10, Budapest.

Italy

Il Concilio, F., Foligno.
 Il Convegno, 7, via Borgospesso, Milano.
 L'Esame, 14, via del Monte Napoleone, Milano.
 La Lettura, 28, via Solferino, Milano.
 Noi e il Mondo, 37, via Milano, Roma.
 Nueva Antologia, Piazza di Spagna, Roma.
 Rivista d'Italia, Soc. Ed. Unitas, 12 via Palestro, Milano.
 La Ronda, Roma.
 Il Secolo, A. Mondadori, Verona.
 Il Secolo XX, Milano.

Jugoslavia

LLublyanski Zvon, LLublyana.
 Dom in Svet, LLublyana.
 Missao, Sima Pandourovitch, Belgrade.
 Pouteri, Belgrade.
 Serpskiy Knyzenni Glasnik, Belgrade.
 Raskasnitaa, Belgrade

Latvia

1. Izglitibas ministrijas menesraksts. Riga.
2. Kulturas Vestnesis. Riga.
3. Latvijas Gramatrupnieks. Riga.
4. Latvijas Saule. Riga.
5. Latvju gramata. Riga.
6. Muzikas Nedela. Riga.
7. Nakotnes Sieviete. Riga.
8. Ritums. Riga.
9. Skaidriba. Riga.
10. Teatra Vestnesis. Riga.

Poland

Naokolo swiata (Around the World), Warsaw.
 Przegląd Warszawski (The Review of Warsaw), Warsaw.
 Pani (The Lady), Warsaw.
 Swiat (The World), Warsaw.
 Tygodnik Ilustrowany (The Illustrated Weekly), Warsaw.

Portugal

ABC.

Diario de Noticias Ilustrado.

Ilustracao Portuguesa.

Lusitania.

Occidente, 4 Travessa do Conuento do Jesus, Libonne.

Revista Portuguesa, 74, Rua Nova do Amalda, Libonne.

Rumania

Cele trei Crisuri, Aradea-Mare.

Cugetul Romaneseo, Bucarest.

Cultura, Cluj.

Flacara, Bucharest.

Gandirea, Bucharest.

Grai si suflet, Bucharest.

Junimea, Literera, Cernauti.

Ramuri-Drum drept, Craiova.

Tara Nostra, Cluj.

Viata Romaneasca, Jassy.

Russia

Bal, Leonidowa Bartacheff, Harbin.

Bambouk, Mamandi, Harbin.

Bessedia, Epoha, Berlin.

Dal, Tornočovskaia, Harbin.

Dalne vostochniy ogonick, Dvorjetskiy, Harbin.

Gar ptitca, Rousskoye iskousto, Paris-Berlin.

Goloss emigranta, Beyllenson, Berlin.

Gredouchaia-rossia, Paris.

Jili Bili, Voevodin, Bizerta-Tunis.

Jivoe slovo, S Pelikanoff, Warsaw.

Journal rousskago vratcha, A. Nibourg, Berlin.

Karpatskiy kraiu, AV Popoff, Moutkaiychovo.

Loutckiy, Loutckaia Rousskaia Gimnasia, Loutck.

Maiak, PG Roubnessoff, Riga.

Molodaia rossia, Rousskoie StO Osch, Berlin.

Niva, Maria zwezdil, Shanghai.

Novosti literatouri, Grani, Berlin.

Okno, Harbin.

Rousskaia kniga kritiki, Iaschenko, Berlin.

Vera i jizn, Bouketoff, New York.

Vesch, Ckifi, Berlin.

Vessioliy obitatel, Harbin.

Voshod, Lenine, Berlin.

Voskressenie, Paris.

Zveno, Vassillieff, Paris.

ARTICLES ON THE ITALIAN SHORT STORY

JULY, 1923, TO JULY, 1924

- BACHELLI, MARIO. "Considerazioni sul mestiere." (L'Esame, July, 1923.)
- BERNASCONI, UGO. "Pensieri." (L'Esame, Jan., 1924.)
- CARDARELLI, VINCENZO. "Quadretti paesani." (L'Esame, Oct., 1923.)
- CARRA, CARLO. "Mostra personale di *Ettore Cosomati*." (L'Esame, June, 1923.)
- DELACROIX, EUGENE. "Dalle 'œuvres littéraires' Sulla pittura." (L'Esame, Oct., 1923.)
- GIUSTI, PAOLO EMILIO. "*Montaigne*." (L'Esame, Oct., 1923.)
- GIUSTI, PAOLO EMILIO. "*Postilla Manzoni*." (L'Esame, Aug., 1924.)
- LELI, MASSIMO. "*Manzoni e l'ideale della politica italiana*." (L'Esame, June, 1923.)
- MONTANO, LORENZO. "Michelaccio di '*Antonio Baldini*.'" (L'Esame, April, 1924.)
- MONTANO, LORENZO. "Di noi superstiti." (L'Esame, Feb., 1924.)
- NEPPI, ALBERTO. "Elogio di Andrea Mantegna." (L'Esame, Feb., 1924.)
- RAIMONDI, GIUSEPPE. "Foglietti letterari." (L'Esame, June, 1923.)
- ROSA, G. TITTA. "Storie di paese." (L'Esame, Nov., Dec., 1923.)
- ROSA, G. TITTA. "La coltura italiana di *Giuseppe Prezzolini*." (L'Esame, Sept., 1923.)
- ROSSI, ALBERTO CESARE. "Dostojewski, di André Gide; Aimée, di Jacques Rivière." (L'Esame, Oct., 1923.)
- SOMARE, ENRICO. "Le fonti dell'arte pura e l'arte italiana." (L'Esame, Oct., 1923.)
- VOSSLER, KARL. "*Manzoni e Kleist*." (L'Esame, June, 1923.)

THE BIOGRAPHICAL ROLL OF HONOUR OF CONTINENTAL SHORT STORIES

1923-1924

Austria

ARTHUR SCHNITZLER. Dramatist and author. His best-known work is "Reigen," produced with great success at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus, Berlin. It created considerable stir not only in literary circles but in the general public. The freedom with which sexual relations were presented in this play led to the author being prosecuted on a charge of having offended public morality. Among other notable dramatic works "Pfarrhaus-Komödie" attained most recognition. The Fate of the Baron Von Leisenbohg.

Belgium

EDMOND GLESSNER. Les Dytiques Histoire de M. Aristide Truffaut, artiste-découpeur. Le Cœur de François Remy. Chronique d'un Petit Pays (Ouvrage couronné par l'Académie Royale de Belgique), 2 Vol. I. Monsieur Honoré. II. Le Citoyen Colette. Le Chant des Veuves. La Chevauchée des Walkyries. Au Beau Plafond, ou l'Enfant Prodigue. L'Oncle d'Amérique. La Vague de Fond.

Bulgaria

IVAN VAZOFF is the greatest Bulgarian author of the century. Born in 1850 at Sopot, his first book appeared in 1871. Following the insurrection of 1876, he wrote the Flag of the Gouzla and the Sorrows of Bulgaria. Under the Yoke in 1889; New Earth in 1903; Peals of Victory in 1913 and Sweet Smell of the Lilacs in 1920.

Czechoslovakia

KAREL CAPEK. Born in 1850. Principally a dramatist, he has written many short stories and philosophic essays. His most celebrated plays were Rur and The World We Live In, The Injured One, The Mark.

Denmark

JOHANNES JENSEN. The Maiden. Himmelslands Historier. Skibet. Christofer Columbus.

Esthonia

AINO KALLAS. The White Ship.

Finland

HASTESKO, ELISA. He, joilla ei ollut hävääteita (Hävääteet). Huliivil.

ROLL OF HONOUR FOR 1923 AND 1924 421

LEINONEN, ARTTURI. Kati. Leipapappi. Lakeuseien Lukko. Nuori. Tuamaala.

MORNE, ARVID. En stormnovell (Klas-Kristians julnatt).

POHJANPAA, LAURI. Vanhan laamannin kuolema (Kultaiset langat).

SILLANPAA, FRANS EMIL. Emät ja poikaset (Enkelten-suojatit). Elama Ja Aurinko. Ihmislapsia Elaman Saatossa. Hurskas Kurjuus.

Germany

JOSEPH WINCKLER. Triologie Der Zeit. Eiserne Sonette. Mitten im Weltkrieg. Ozean. Irrgarten Gottes oder die Komodie des Chaos. Der Ruf des Rheins. Der Tolle Bomberg. Der Chiliastische Pilgerzug.

Greece

N. G. KATHFORNE. For a New Resurrection. The Biggest Event.

Holland

CYRIEL BUTSSE. De laatste Ronde. Tantes. Sujer-indrukken van Parijs in 1923. Het prachtkleed van Vlasmderen.

T. E. HALTYN. The Wild Peasant Girl.

Hungary

ZOLSAM AMBRIS. Tancir es Tulisra.

GEZA GARDONY. A Painter in the Village.

FERENCZ HERCZOG. Arianna.

Italy

ANTONIO BELTRAMELLI. Il Cantico. Gli Uomini Rosse. Il Cavalier Mostardo. Ahi Giacometta la Tua Ghirlandella. L'Ombra del Mandorlo. I Segni del Fascino. Il Passo dell' Ignota. La Citta Morta. Anna Perenna. I Primogeniti. L'Alterna Vigenda. Le Novelle Della Guerra. Tre Bimbe a vendere. Le Favole Del Principe Ignoto.

VIRGILIO BROCCI. Born in Cremona. Le Aquile. La Gironda. Il Labirinto. Miti. Secondo il Cuor Mio. Netty. L'Isola Sonante. La Bottega Segli Scandali. Sul Caval Della Morte Amor Cavalca. Il Lastrico Dell' Inferno. I Sentieri Della Virtù. La Coda del Diavolo. L'Amore Beffardo. Fragilita. L'Arcolaio.

LUCIANO FOLGORE. La Citta dei Girasoli. Poeti Allo Specchio.

ALFREDO PANZINI. Il Padrone Sono Me. Il Libro dei Morti. La Cagna Nera. Santippe. La Madonna di Mama. Viaggio di un Povero Letterato. Io Cerco Moglie. Il Diavolo Nella mia Libreria. Il Mondo e Rotondo. Storia di Tre Re e Gelsomino Buffone di Corte. Dignorine. Piccole Storie Del Mondo Grande. La Fiabe della Virtù. Novelle d'Ambo i Sessi. Donne, Madonne E. Bimbi.

LUIGI PIRANDELLO. Born in 1867 at Crigenti. L'Esclusa. Il truno. Il fu Mattia Pascal. I vecchi e i giovani. Le beffe della e della vita. Quand'ero matto. Bianche e nere. Tu ridi. Un cavallo nella luna. Berecche e la guerra. Il carnevale dei morti. Il turno lontano. Terzetti.

MICHELE SAPONARO. *La Vigilia. Peccato. Fiorella. Amore di Terra Lontana. La Casa Senza Sole. Nostra Madre. L'Altra Sorella. L'Uomo. Le Ninfe e i Satiri. Le Mie Cinque Fidanzate.*

NINO SAVARESE. *Pensieri e allegorie. Piccoli romanzi Trovamale. Ricordi di strada.*

Jugoslavia

MOMCHILO MILOSHLEVITCH. *Prolasnitchi. Pod sharim krovom soneti. Pred obnovom pesme. Savremene uritchi. Moje tsarstvo pesme.*

Latvia

JANIS AKURATERS. Born in 1876. He has made his mark in Lettish literature as a novelist as well as a lyrical poet and a dramatist. For his dramas he seeks his stuff largely in ancient Lettish lore and has dramatised the old Lettish and Livland heroes Viesturs, Kaupo. . . . His latest collection of short stories is called *Erosa cilts* (Eros), from which the tale *Death* is chosen. An important essay by Akuraters on *l'Influence de la civilisation française en Latvie*, appeared in the *Revue Bleue* for 1924 (No. 7).

ANNA BRIGADER. Born in 1869. In 1922 she celebrated the jubilee of her literary activity and was made the recipient of many tokens of popular favour, notably of an estate named "*Spriditis*," after the name of the hero of her best-known play. While she has written novels and verse of considerable merit her chief reputation rests on her dramatic works: *Iga. Heteras mantojums. Spriditis* (fairy tale). In her *Dzelzs dure* (The Iron Fist) she gives some remarkable descriptions of conditions in Riga in 1918-19, during the German occupation.

JANIS EJERINS. Born in 1891. *Briva Zeme. Der Lei erkast en. Der rosige Eecl. Leijerkaste.*

ANDREJS UPITIS. Born in 1877. During the short reign of Communism in Latvia he was Commissary for Art and Culture in Riga. He spent some time in Soviet Russia, then returned to Latvia and resumed his literary activities. His last work is *Die Metamorphosen*, from which the short story, *The Golden Staircase*, is chosen.

Norway

KRISTIAN ELSTER. *Uncle Ferdinand. Skyggernes Slaegt. Den Skjonne Ungdom.*

Poland

ZYGMUNT BARTKIEWICZ. Born in 1870 in Łódź. Author of short stories of animal life, full of fine sentiment and understanding of the psychology of animals, as well as of the life of the slums of big cities. Great mastery in the psychological drawing of human weakness and of the sadness of every-day life of the forgotten. *Souls of dogs* (*Psie dusze*). *Feeble Hearts* (*Slabe serca*). *With Blood and Ink* (*Krwia i atramentem*).

KORNEL MAKUSZYNSKI. Born in 1882 in Stryj, near the Carpathian Mountains, studied in the high school of Lwow and in the university of Lwow. Author of many short stories, literary sketches and some

novels. The most known short stories: *Gay Things* (Rzeczy wesole). *Pearls and Swine* (Perły i wieprze). *The Game of Happiness* (Zabawa w szczęście). *Arabian Adventures* (Awantury arabskie).

DUCH ZAPOMNIANY. He is the most prominent satirical writer in Poland. His works contain true gems of satire combined with a special Polish note of poetic melancholy and sentiment. Very original in style.

GUSTAW OLECHOWSKI. Born in 1874 in Borja near Sandomir. Studied in the high school of Radom, Commercial Institute in Anvers, School of Political Science in Brussels and Warsaw and International Law Academy in Hague. Author of novels, dramas and three volumes of short stories: *The Knight* (Rycerz). *Things Seen* (Rzeczy widziane). *The Psychologist and the Heathen Woman* (Psycholog i poganka).

STEFAN ZEROMSKI. Born in 1864 in Strawczyn, district of Kielce, near Cracow. Studied in the high school of Kielce and the University of Warsaw. One of the most genial Polish authors. Wrote a great amount of novels, dramas, dramatic poems as well as some volumes of short stories, which, however, belong to the time of Poland's sufferings under the yoke of Russia. His best short stories are: *The Ravens and Crows will Tear Us Up* (Rozdziobia nas kruki, wrony . . .), a volume of short stories painting the time of the Polish Insurrection against Russia in 1863, *Ariman Revenges Himself* (Aryman mści się), *Short Novels* (Utwory powiesciowe). His novel, *The Faithful River* (Wierna rzeka), is one of the greatest works ever written in Poland. Zeromski writes of the soul of the Polish intellectual classes in their great endeavour to save the Polish national feeling from complete destruction in the dreadful conditions of slavery and abasement. He may himself be called the knight of the Polish freedom. Greatest master of the Polish language.

KAZIMIERZ TETMAJER. Born in the Tatra Mountains in 1865. Polish poet of great talent. Studies at the high school and at the University of Cracow. Author of many dramatic and lyric poems, of novels and short stories as *Scetches*, *Melancholy*, and series of *Tatra stories*: *On the Rocky Slopes* (Na skalnem Podhalu), where he first introduced the dialect of Tatra mountaineers into Polish literature. These novels and stories are of special poetic value as pictures of mountain life.

WACŁAW SIEBOWSZEWSKI. Born in 1858 in a Polish village called Wólka Kozłowska. He interrupted his studies in a high school, passed two years as a locksmith's helper, and then finished his education in the Technical School of the Warsaw-Vienna Railway. At the age of twenty he was exiled to Siberia and lived there for many years among the Yakouts (Siberian natives). Author of many novels and short stories which are of great interest because of the novelty and originality of the subject and the charm of his style. The best of his short stories, depicting the life of Polish exiles as well as of the natives of Siberia are: *On the Edge of the Forests* (Na kresach lasow), *Chinese Stories* (Powiesci chinskie), *(Z fali na fale)*, *From Wave to Wave*, *Tales* (Bajki), *Ol-Soni-Kisan*. In his latest works he deals with the post-war events in Russia and Poland as for instance in his drama *The Bolsheviki*, or the monography, *Joseph Pilsudski*.

Portugal

A. D'AGUILAR. *The Treasure of Almeida.*

Rumania

MARIE, QUEEN OF RUMANIA. *Tara mea (My Country). Canduri si icoane din vremea rasboiului. Dal Mio Cuore al loro Cuore.*

AGARBICEANU. *Transylvanian priest and patriot. Archanghelii. Tefelega. Zidele din urma a Capit. Parvu. Trasurica verde. In intuneric.*

SANDU ALDEA. *Innurmaplugului. Pe drumul Baraganului. Pe Margineanca.*

J. A. BRATESCO-VOINESTI. *Born in 1869. Magistrate, then advocate. In lumed dreptatei. Intuneric si lumina. Sorana. In slujba Pacci. The violoncello.*

N. IORGA. *Born in 1871 at Botosani. Master at Bucharest University, and the Sorbonne (Paris), member of the Rumanian Académie, and correspondent for the Institut de France, historian. History of the Byzantine Empire (in English). History of Rumanian Literature (in Rumanian). History of the Rumanian People (in Rumanian). Contes Roumains (in French). L'Art Roumain (in French). La Roumanie Pitoresque (in French). Histoires des Croisades (in French).*

M. SADOVEANU. *Born at Falticeni. Director of the National Theatre. Iassy. Somii. Neamul Soimarestilor. In delta. La Noi in viisoara. Cantecul amintirii. Pildele lui C. Vichentie. Lacrimile Ieromonahului Veniamin. Oameni si Locuri.*

Russia

VSEVOLOD IVANOFF. *A writer of Siberian stories. Golubie Peski. Vozvratchenie Buddia. Izd. Russkikh Pisateley. Ognennaya Dusha. Sedmoi bereg razkazi. The Child.*

ALEXANDRE KUPRINE. *Gambrinus and other stories. The Star of Solomon. The Emerald. The Second Lieutenant and other stories. The Fight. The Change. Yama. Salome and other stories. Seasickness.*

BORIS PILNIAK. *Bielokonskoie. St. Nicholas of the White Fountain. Arina. White Stories. The Barren Year. Ivan and Marie. Metelinka. Petrograd Stories. The Call of Death.*

Spain

VICENTE BLASCO IBANEZ. *Cuentos Valencianos. La condenada. Arroz y Tartana. Flor de Mayo. La Barraca. Sonnica la cortesana. Entre Naranjos. Canas y barro. La Catedral. El intruso. La Bodega. La Horda. La Maja Desnuda. Sangre y arena. Los muertos mandan. Los Argonautas. Los cuatro Jinetes del Apocalipsis. Mare Nostrum. Los enemigos de la mujer. El prestamo de la Fifunta. El Paraiso de las Mujeres. La Tierra de Todos. La Reina Calafia. Novelas de la Costa Azul.*

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Sweden

ALBERT ENGSTRÖM. Born in 1869. Painter and writer, member of the Swedish Academy. Founder of the comic paper "Strix." Adel Präster Smugglare Boender. Bästa. Raenninghus Samlade Beraet-
telse. Teckningar. En gyldenne Bock.

GUSTAV HELLSTRÖM. Born in 1882 at Kristianstad. M.A. at the University of Lund, Sweden, 1903. Foreign correspondent to the "Dagens Nyheter" ("Daily News"). Has published since 1904 about fifteen volumes of short stories and novels. Ungkarlar. När mannen vaknar. Kring en Kvinna. Bengt Blancks sentimentala resa. Ett rekommendationsbrev. Daggrömmar. En mycket ung man. Olsson Gar I Land.

PAR LAGERKVIST. Born in 1891 at Värjö. One of the most prominent Swedish authors of the modern school. Ordkonst och bildkonst. Motive. Järn och människor. Angest. Teater.

MARIKA STJERNSTEDT. Born in 1875 at Stockholm, daughter of Baron L. W. Stjernstedt and his Polish wife, Pauline V. Ciechanowiecka. In 1909 she married the well-known Swedish author, Ludvig Nordström Janinas hjärta. Det röda inslaget. Gena. Landahövdingens dotter. Daniela Herz. Alma Wittfogels rykte.

HERTEMAN-ERICSON, GURIL, RASUNDA. Born in Gothenbourg, March 11, 1879. Married Olof Ericson. Math. Hall à Gothenbourg, Cambridge training college, diplômée de l'Université de St. Andrews, (litt. angl.), Director of "Rösträtt för kvinnor," Women's Suffrage League, since 1913. Works: Bojor 1910; Fortrollad 1911, Dalbogarden 1912, Av Gammal kopmannasslakt 1915, De Stumma Legioners 1918, Trotsa Viljor 1920, Huset med Vindakuporna 1923.

CARLSSON RAGNAR. Born in Vestervik in 1900. Skepparhi storiér, 1919. I Polaris Tecken 1923.

Turkey

RESUK HALID. The Peach Garden. The Grey Donkey.

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Bena, Matyas. Zlostiny (B. Koci, Prague).
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Benesova, Božena. Obloužení (Družstevní práce, Prague).
Benoni, Josef. Alt-Landskroner (Czerny, Landskron, 1923).
Bezo, Jan. Sirota (V. & E. Bezo, Trnava).
Blatný, Lev. Vitr v ohradě (Obzor, Prerove).
Bobek, František. Na Valasských horách (Tomase Pospisila, Hranice).
Bouska, Bohumil. Ver a doufej! (Dědictví Malických, Kralové).
Brabec, Adolf. Zápas o dědictví (Obziny Vyskov, Aventinum, 1924).
Bila pani a (Svatek, Prague).
Brejtník, Vladimír. Tri rakobtetoj (Plzen, 1923).
Bystrina, Otakar. Hanacké figurky (Lidové tiskárny, Olomouc, 1924).
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Cecetka, František Josef. Samson a Dalila (Tiskli Neuber, Prague).
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- Czambel, Samuel.* Prostonarodné slovenské povesti (Tlaci).
- Demarteau, R.* Zpoved deviti (Smichov).
- Dwryck, Jaroslav.* Smich vernosti (Lidové, Prague).
- Edschmid, Kasimir.* Die Amazone (Stiepel, Reichemberg, 1923).
- von Eichendorff, Josef, Skopal, Eduard.* Aus dem Leben eines Taugenichts (Kutna Hora, Prague, 1923).
- Erben, Karel Jaromir.* Kystices (Kryl a Scotti).
- Fingal, Petr (pseud. Frantisek Fingi).* Noemi (Ziegner, Prague, 1923).
- Frusova, Anna.* V zakoutich srdci (V. Kotrba, Prague, 1923).
- Halek, Vitezslav.* Na statku a v chaloupce (Rebec, 1923).
- Hamersky, Jaroslav.* Ze zasnenych dalek (Treboni, Prague).
- Haskova, Jarmila.* Robinson (Leschinger, Prague).
- Hasmandova, Fanna.* Obrazky z Moravskeho Slovacka (Narodni).
- Haslaca, Jan.* Pisen korálových utesuv (Belsky a Jezek).
- Heyduk, Adolf.* Tri zkazky (J. Otto, Prague).
- Hlavin, Karel.* Venuse vitezna (Narodni, Lidova, 1924).
- Hlubucek, Karel.* Co je láska (Nadrazni, 1923).
- Bezenka lasky (Pardubich, 1923)
- Hofmeister, Rudolf Richard.* Neznáma dramata (Prague, 1923).
- Hora, F.* Sneženka dcera pohlavarova (Prerov, Prague).
- Zahadny pytlak (Tylova, Prague, 1923).
- Hrusovsky, Jan.* Pompiliova Madonna (Bratislava, 1923).
- Hulka, Jaroslav.* Prokleti lidé (Svobody, Prague).
- Hübner, Marie.* Gablinzer Wore (von Reinhold Wunsch, 1923).
- Jahoda, Josef.* Zlatý zub a jiné (Prague).
- Pablesky (Jan Svatek, Prague). Pablesky (Jan Svatek, Prague).
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- Jasoricka, Vlasta.* Popelka (Kralova, 1923).
- Milostpani (Kralova, 1924).
- Jehlickova, Bozena.* Sla svetem láska (Pozdrav ze Chval).
- Jeji.* Jaros a Kalhaus (Prague).
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- Jesenaka, Ruzena.* Odhalena srdce (Edice Ametyst, Prague).
- Jirasek, Alois.* Na ostrově. Druhy kvet. (J. Otto, Prague).
- Kalina, Ondrej (pseud. Jan Smetanay).* Sbráné práce Ondreja Kalinu (Tatran).
- Karas, Josef Frantisek.* Z temných dob. (Jan Svatek, Prague).
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- Kada, Karel.* Povesti a staré tradice z Podbrdská I (Prague, 1923).
- Klastersky, Antonin.* V zari svobody (M. Knapp, 1923).
- Klimos, Vissarion Josifovic.* Rackove (Sefla v Beroune).
- Klitschke de la Grange.* Vestalka (V Brné, 1924).
- Koci, Tomas.* Vykoupeni (Selských Hlasus).
- Koloe'ja.* Klassy (Vinohrady, 1923).
- Kolman-Cassius, Jaroslav.* Povidky pro Fáičky (Borovy, Prague).
- Kolbenheyer, Erwin Guido.* Der Dornbusch brennt (Bühmerland, Leipzig).
- Korolenko, Vladimir Galaktionovic.* Z Povolzi (Kutna Hora, Prague).
- Kosmak, Václav.* Obrazky z kukatka (V Brne, 1923).
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- Kozisek, Josef.* Pohádka lesa (Prague, 1923).
- Kraus, Václav.* V usemi lidojeduv (Prerov, Prague).
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- Kraft, Václav Karel.* Vancila (Lukavského, 1923).
- Kramolín, Cenek.* Bratři Dolináci (Prerov, Prague).
- Krasnohorska, Eliška* (pseud. E. Pechosa). Pestré povídky (Knihovna, 1923).
- Kubín, Josef.* Lidové povídky z českého Podkrkonoší (Bursík & Kohout).
- Kukucin, Martin* (pseud. Matej Bencur). Získovo pole (B. Vilímek, Prague).
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- Kysela, F.* (pseud. A. Sauer) Franta Haban se Ziskova (Prague).
- Lányi, Menyhert.* Keleti hajos (Kosice-Kassa, 1923).
- Laskomerský, Gustav Karol* (pseud. G. K. Zechenter). Sobjerané Zarty a rosmary (Martin).
- Lazarovskij, Boris Aleksandrovic.* Liza (Vinohrady, Prague, 1923).
- Leger, Karel.* Tri svadlensky (Topic, Prague).
- List, Pavel.* Soumravné chvíle (Prague, 1923).
- Lorenz, Pierre.* Erzählungen und Gedichte (J. Kobrtisch, 1924).
- Lusicka, Venceslava.* V tanci (Hejda & Zbroj., 1923).
Co si stany a kose na brehu morakém v síme vypravovaly (Hejda & Zbroj, 1923).
- Macha, Jaroslav.* Legionárské a jiné humoresky (Obrozeni, Prague).
Pan Tentononc (Tousimsky, 1923).
- Mandlova, Ruzena.* Kniha feuilletonu (Neuber, 1923).
- Maria Alfonza.* Vanoce (Globus, 1923).
- Mauder, Emil.* Heitere Geschichten (Strache, Warnsdorf, 1923).
- Mills, Enos.* Matka medvedice (Prague, 1924).
- Misek, Elin F.* Mala svadlenka (Tousimsky, Varsaw, 1923).
Srdce na krizi (Tousimsky, Varsaw, 1923).
- Mrstik, Alois, a Mrstik, Vilem.* Bavinkovy seny (Prague, 1923).
- Montegut, Maurios.* Cislozostvi Felicie Plunardové (Tousimsky, Varsaw, 1923).
- Moravec, Bedrich.* Dva legionari (Geringera, Chicago, 1923).
- Musaus, Johann Karl August.* Geschichten vom Ritzahl (Gebrüder Stiepel).
- Na. Besede* (C. & E. Bezo).
- Na kole.* Na kole se Sydneye do Melbourne (Prague).
- Nazirin, Ivan Fedorovic.* V mlhach budoucnosti (Prague, 1923).
- Nemcova, Bosma.* Pohoraka vesnice (Kober, Prague).
- Neruda, Jan.* Povídky malostranské (Obrozeni, Kyjov, and following).
- Novák, Vasilas.* Tahitaka manselstvi (Prague, 1923).
- Noackova, Teresa.* Vykriky a vzdechy (Prague).
- Noš.* Nové ruské povídky (Cervna, 1923).
- Nessera, Rudolf.* Klicovou dirkou (Olomouci, 1923).
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- O. O, jak je menivě to srdce seny.* (Trebechovicich, 1923).
- Obrazkov.* Slovenské povesti (Ruzomberku).
- Opocensky, Gustav Robert.* Lidé z periferie (Presto, Prague).
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- Paulovic, Augustin.* Miso Krkavec, mudre od vychodu (Horovitzs, Trnava).
- Pecka, Dominik.* Matka bozi v trni (Olomouci, 1923).

- Pechhold, Rudolf Karl.* Schönhengster Gestalten (J. Czerny, Landakron).
Perninger, Josef Sebastian. Pod panakou parukou (Prague, 1924).
Petrus, Jan. Kotrziны (Prague, 1924).
Philippe, Charles Louis. O kovari a nevestce (A. Novotny, Prague, 1923).
Pospiril, Josef. Pohádka o králi Václavu a Romane (Československa akciová (Prague, 1923).
 Jak deti miluji (Melantrichu, Prague).
 . . . Soumrak (Karel Solc. Kutná Hora, 1924).
Poppova, Mario (a) de Maupassant, Guy. Obet smíření (Tatran, 1923).
Preissova, Gabriela. Ovečka a jiné povídky (Statniho, Prague, 1923).
 Horelové (J. Otty, Prague).
Prager, Ferdinand. Vinohrad J. A. Komenakého (Jan Graffe, Brode, 1923).
Rais, Karel Václav. Vyminkari (Unie, Prague, 1924).
 Pulpani (Unie, Prague, 1924).
Rozulek, Jan Václav. Opile mesto (Hejda & Zbroj, 1923).
Roy, Kristina. Spinena tuzba (G. & E. Bezo, Trnava, 1923).
Sauer, Julius. Das Einhorn (Gebrüder Stiepel, Reichenberg).
Schiöbl, Jaroslav. Hrad Radyně (Hankova, 1924).
Selapa, Karel. Vecny sivot (A. Srdce, Prague, 1923).
Silestre, Armand. Nahé povídky (Horky, Vrsovice, 1923).
Skultety, Augustin Horislav, a Dobinsky Pavel. Prostonarodné slovenské povesti (Knihtlaciarskeho, Turčiansky).
 Lomidrevo alebo Valibuk (G. & E. Bezo, Trnava, 1923).
Skrusny, Josef. Ve zpevdnici (J. R. Vilimek, Prague, 1923).
Slansky, Antonin. Lakomec (A. Storch, Prague).
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Smrsek, Jan. Odsudeny k vecitejzizni (Martin, Turčiansky).
Smilonsky, Alois Vojtech (pseud. Alois Schmilauer). Nebesa. Procul Negotiis. Rozptýlené kapitoly. Bez lasky (Neuber, Prague, 1923)
 Červený destník, Tatinkovy hodiny. Kovárna na Klenici. Vacha z Nebuzna. Pater Antonin Jehla. Pan Kontribucni. Hodina v expedité (Neuber, Prague, 1923).
 Pod doskovými strechami. Spaleny Simak. Baron Krusina. Perla v hurbé kazajce.
 Lesní panenka (Neuber, Prague, 1923).
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Sosa, Antonin. O mlkovaní, lasce a zrade (Frant. Obszina, Aventinum, 1923).
Sramek, Frana. Zasnouci vojak (Polygrafie Brno, Prague, 1924).
Starorucki. Statotusik Opovidania.
Stastny, A. B. Potopeny ostrov (Neuberta na Smichové, 1923).
 Povoden v udoli (Neuberta na Smichové, 1923).
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- Storch-Marien, Otakar.* Modry kolibrik (Aventinum).
Storm, Hans Theodor Waldsen. Pole Poppenspüler (Gebrüder Stiepel, Reichenberg).
Strycko Ferdinand (pseud. F. Dubrasky). Praskavice (Bezo, Trnava).
Suk, Ivan. Slunecni lasky (Prague, 1923).
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Tongi, S. U. (Ignotus). Pod palmami (Prague, 1923).
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Tri. Tri prstonarodné rozprávky (G. E. Bezo, Trnava, 1923).
Turnwald, Anne. Die Werdenden (Franz Kraus, Reichenberg, 1923).
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